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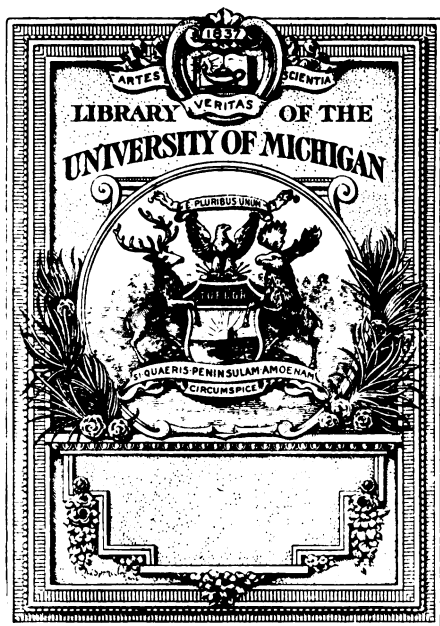
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B Y
W I L L I A M C R A I G, D. D.
O N E O F T H E M I N I S T E R S O F G L A S G O W.

Πότε ἔν παρέσαι ὁ χρόνος ἕτος, ὦ Σώκρατες ; καὶ τίς
ὁ παιδεύσων ; ἥδιστα γάρ ἂν μοι δοκῶ ἰδεῖν τὸν τὸν
ἄνθρωπον τίς ἐσιν. Plat. Alcib. 2.

Εγὼ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τῷ κόσμῳ· ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοί, ὃ μὴ
περιπατήσει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς
ζῶης. Johan. Cap. 8.

G L A S G O W,

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P R E F A C E.

THE principal design of the following essay, is to delineate the character of Jesus Christ, from the facts recorded in the history of his life. In the execution of this design, it was thought proper to prefix a short account of the extraordinary interpositions of Providence, recorded in the gospel; in order to excite the greater attention to the principal subject and design of the essay. This is done in the first section. In the two following sections, a particular explication of the character of Jesus is attempted to be given, from the history of his life. Many useful observations have been made, by different writers, on this subject; and the several virtues and perfections, which appeared in the life of Jesus, have been marked. But what these writers have observed, gives us rather a detail of scattered, though beautiful particulars, than a single and connected view of the whole character at once. It would appear however from the records of the gospel, that the character of Jesus Christ was formed, in every part of it, upon the influence of one great and leading principle: and that the whole tenor of his life, proceeding from this influence, was one united and consistent thing.—To give this

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simple and united view, is the design of what is offered in the second and third sections. In the last section a few general reflexions on the life of Jesus are subjoined, which, 'tis hoped, will appear to be sufficiently supported by the preceding narrative.

If what is humbly offered to the public in this essay, however far short it may fall, of the dignity and importance of the subject, shall in any degree, contribute to make the character and life of Jesus better understood, and more esteemed: or if it shall induce some others, who have more leisure and capacity, to do greater justice to the subject, the purpose of the publication is obtained.

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O N T H E

C H A R A C T E R A N D O F F I C E

O F

J E S U S C H R I S T.

I N T R O D U C T I O N.

IT must be evident at first view to every one who looks into the writings of the four Evangelists, that they have given to the world the history of a very extraordinary personage. Jesus Christ whose life and actions they have left upon record, was in their apprehension, the Son of God; 'Had been in the beginning with God,' and was sent into this world by the special appointment of his Father, on a very important and extraordinary design: and Jesus Christ himself so soon as he appeared publicly amongst mankind assumed this high and sacred character, declaring that what he taught and did was by his immediate commission and authority. Hence we are naturally led to enquire, what is to be found in the history of his life, that is equal to the dignity

and importance of this character; and we unavoidably expect to meet with some peculiar marks of excellence and merit in the life of a person whom we are taught to honour as the messenger and Son of God. We shall find accordingly in the history of his life, such a series of extraordinary events, as fully answers this natural expectation, and marks his character in a very striking and distinguished manner.

These extraordinary events were of two kinds,

1st, Such as proceeded more immediately from the providence of God, and were the effects of an extraordinary interposition of his power.

2dly, Such as proceeded more immediately from Christ himself, and were the consequences of his own extraordinary wisdom, power and goodness.

To these two different attestations of his character, Jesus appears to have referred, when he told the Jews, * ‘ I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me, beareth witness of me,” i. e. I attest the truth of my commission from the Father, by the purity and goodness of my life, by the wisdom and importance of the doctrines which

I teach, and by the mighty works which I perform. The Father also beareth witness of me by the marvellous interpositions of his power and providence in my behalf.

It is chiefly proposed in the following essay, to consider those events in the history of the gospel by which Jesus Christ bore witness of himself, and manifested the peculiar dignity and importance of his character : as these however were accompanied with some extraordinary interpositions of providence, by which his heavenly Father also bore witness of him, it may not be improper to prefix a short account of them from the records of the gospel.

SECTION I.

Of the extraordinary interpositions of divine Providence recorded in the history of Jesus Christ.

WHEN God sent his Son into the world, he judged it proper to attest his divine commission, and announce the dignity and importance of his character by some very extraordinary appearances of providence. He did not indeed distinguish him, or announce his dignity by any of those outward honours and advantages of life, which are the great objects of human ambition, and by which the pride of man makes him fond to be distinguished. Jesus was so far from being honour'd and distinguished in this manner by his heavenly Father, that he lived entirely destitute of all the honours and advantages of this world. He had not, as he says himself, 'Where to lay his head;' as his prophet hath expressed it, 'He had no form nor comeliness; when men saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him, and therefore he was rejected and despised.

This circumstance however was with great propriety adapted to the sacred office which he was to bear, and the purposes for which

he came from God. He was sent into this world with a view to plant the principles of virtue, and religious wisdom in the hearts of men; and to raise them from the sensible and temporary enjoyments of this life, to the pursuit of those enjoyments which are of a spiritual, religious and immortal nature. But the principal obstruction which Jesus had to encounter in the execution of this design, was that strong attachment to the interests and distinctions of this world, which is deeply rooted in the heart of man. It behoved him therefore when he came into this world, to set the insignificance of all its interests and enjoyments in a proper light. This he did in a strong and striking manner by the doctrines which he taught; and still more strongly by the destitute and low state of life in which he chose to make his progress through this world. Jesus hereby taught his friends of how small account the enjoyments and distinctions of this world were in his esteem; and from his own example shewed them, 'That the life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.' To this it may be added, that the distinctions of this world are of too little importance in the sight of God to be chosen by him as the proper marks of his regard, or the means by which he would attest the honour of his Son. The worthless

of men have oftentimes the greatest share of them, and the worthiest of men have them least in their esteem. God, we may believe, sees nothing great or excellent among mankind, if it is not the immortal virtues and improvements of the soul, and the immortal and immutable distinctions which proceed from these.

But although Jesus Christ possessed none of the external honours and advantages of human life, he was nevertheless remarkably honoured and distinguished by his Father in a different way; and we meet with such extraordinary expressions of regard from the providence of God, in the history of his life, as must give us a very high idea of the dignity and merit of his character. These I proceed to mention.

On this part of the subject it may be of use to divide the history of Jesus into the following periods.

1st, The period of his infancy and childhood, when he made his first appearance in this world.

2d, The period of his public ministry.

3d, The period of his last sufferings and death. And,

4th, That period which succeeded to his death till he finally departed from this world.

1st, Let us take a view of the infancy and childhood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ob-

serve by what extraordinary appearances he was then distinguished by divine Providence, and declared to be the Son of God. A patient and candid reader will not be surprised, if the manner in which he was conceived and brought into the world is mentioned in the first place ;* and the rather that this extraordinary circumstance is so well connected with the sequel of the history, and so admirably suited to the dignity of him who was declared to be the Son of God. ' In the beginning he had been ' with God ;' and when he came into this world, he was to be distinguished from the whole human race, by being ' Holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners.' There could not therefore be a more proper introduction to the life of such an extraordinary man, nor could any circumstance either more strongly indicate the honour which in the beginning he had with God, or presage his future innocence and purity, than this extraordinary event ; and it may deserve our particular observation, that if it did not happen as recorded by the writers of the gospel, it is impossible to conceive how they came to think of it, or to devise a circumstance so admirably suited to the dignity of the person whose history they

* Luke i. 26.

have wrote. If it was only a contrivance of their own, to dignify the subject of their story, they must have had a degree of ingenuity and art, of which no reasonable man can believe they were possessed.

After Jesus had been brought into the world in this manner, his first appearance upon earth was distinguished by some singular interpositions from the providence of God. * An unusual star was seen by some eastern Magi, by which they understood that the king of the Jews, who was expected about that time by the whole Jewish nation, agreeably to the prophecies preserved in their sacred records, was born in Judea; and by this marvellous appearance in the heavens, they were conducted to the place of his nativity.

† Much about the same time, some simple shepherds waiting on their flocks in the adjacent fields, were astonished at the appearance of an extraordinary light which shone from heaven, and of one of the glorious ministers of God, who informed them that the Saviour of the world was then born at Bethlehem; directed them where and how they should discover him, and foretold that this event should be the source of joy to all the na-

* Mat. ii. 1.

† Luke ii. 8.

tions of the world: after which they heard a multitude of the heavenly host praising God on account of this event.

To these marvellous events, are to be joined the description of his character and office, which was given by the angel to the Virgin Mary †, the prophecy of Zacharias concerning Jesus ‡, the anthems that were sung by Mary and Elizabeth on the promise of the angel §, the revelation that was made to Anna and Simon in the temple, and the transport with which that holy man received the infant Saviour into his arms, and discoursed of him to those who were worshipping in the temple.**

By these events the nativity of Jesus Christ, and the first appearance which he made among mankind, were distinguished with peculiar marks of honour from the providence of God. In other respects the circumstances of his birth were but mean, and such as tended rather to create contempt. His parents were obscure and indigent; they were not able to procure for their infant child any better accommodation than is given to the cattle of the field; and were, soon after he was born, obliged to fly with him into a foreign country in order to preserve his life. But a-

† Luke i. 32.

‡ Luke i. 67.

§ Luke i. 39.

** Luke ii. 25.

midst those circumstances of indigence and meanness, proceeding from the ignorance or wickedness of men, he was distinguished by his heavenly Father with the highest marks of honour and esteem. The great laws of nature and providence were changed, to introduce him to this world with a becoming honour and solemnity; and the ministers of God were sent from heaven to announce his dignity.

In this manner happened the nativity of Jesus Christ: and it may not be improper to remark on this period of his history; that the circumstances with which it was accompanied, were with great propriety adapted to the two different states in which he was afterwards to appear. He was, first, as the teacher, and the Saviour of the world, to humble and abase himself, and to suffer an ignominious and painful death. His prophet had foretold, that he should be a * ‘Man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs;’ and he himself declares, † ‘That he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.’ He was likewise to appear in a very high and elevated station, as the angel had declared at his nativity: ‡ ‘He was to be great, and to be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God was to give him

* Isaiah liii. 3.

† Mat. xx. 28.

‡ Luke i. 31.

‘ the throne of his father David :’ and in consequence of his voluntary humiliation of himself, § ‘ God was highly to exalt him, and to give him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’

The mean and the honourable circumstances of his birth, were agreeable to these two different appearances, which Jesus was afterwards to make. The first presaged his approaching ignominy and distress ; and the last, ‘ the glory that should follow.’

After Jesus had made his first appearance upon earth in the manner above related, he lived in retirement and obscurity, till he was about thirty years of age, and then entered on his public ministry. This was the second period of his history, in which it was proposed to mention the marks of honour with which he was distinguished by the providence of God.

The first circumstance of this nature, was the prophecy and ministry of John the Baptist. This singular, and holy man, was sent before him as his messenger, to dispose the

Jews to receive him as the promised Messiah : and by his ministry a very singular attestation was given to the dignity of Jesus. The miraculous prediction that was made to Zacharias and Elizabeth, * of the birth of John, and of the office which he was to bear, together with the extraordinary circumstances in which he was brought into the world, were evidently intended by the providence of God, to mark the dignity of Jesus, whose messenger he was declared to be : and when he came of age, the manner of his life, and the doctrine which he taught, no less remarkably contributed to this effect. He was not indeed distinguished by the pomp of an ambassador from an earthly prince ; but more agreeably to the nature of his office, and that of the Messiah before whom he was sent, he distinguished himself, by the wisdom and importance of his instructions, and by the uncommon purity and virtue of his manners. The external circumstances of his life were exceedingly contemptible. † He resided in a wilderness, and had little better food, cloathing, or accommodation than the cattle of the field ; but he was so eminently distinguished by the piety and purity of his life, that in spite of the strongest prejudice, he commanded the universal

veneration of the Jewish nation; and †
 made Herod, a debauched, licentious prince,
 reverence his character, and hear his instruc-
 tions gladly. Agreeably to this, he did not
 labour to introduce Jesus to the city, and
 people of Jerusalem, in the pompous manner
 that an earthly prince is introduced into his
 kingdom, but he attempted a more arduous
 and honourable thing. He laboured to pro-
 cure their esteem of his superior dignity and
 virtue, their submission and obedience to his
 laws, and their acceptance of him as the Son
 of God and Saviour of the world, in spite
 of that peculiar and strong aversion to him
 which he foresaw they would conceive on ac-
 count of his poverty and meanness, the sim-
 plicity of his manners, and the purity of his
 doctrine; * ‘He prepared his way, and made
 ‘ straight his paths, by filling up every valley;
 ‘ by levelling every mountain,’ i. e. by opening
 a passage into the hearts of men, through eve-
 ry prejudice, and every passion that opposed
 him, ‘That all men might see the salvation of
 ‘ God.’

While John the baptist was thus employed
 in the duties of his office, Jesus himself be-
 gan his public ministry. The first thing that
 occurs in this period of his history, is a sin-

gular expression of his humility, accompanied with a singular expression of regard from his heavenly father. Jesus had come with the rest of the Jews to receive the baptism of John. The baptist knowing that he was the Christ, at first refused to do this office for him; declaring that Jesus could receive no advantage from his baptism, but that he himself stood in need of the baptism of Jesus. When Jesus nevertheless, insisted that it was a proper thing; and that he was resolved to shew by his example, a suitable regard to every ordinance of God, John consented to administer the sacred institution; and during the administration, God was pleased to give a very singular attestation to the dignity of Jesus, † ‘Lo the
 ‘ heavens were opened to him, and he saw the
 ‘ Spirit of God descending like a dove, and
 ‘ lighting upon him, and lo! a voice from
 ‘ heaven saying, This is my beloved Son in
 ‘ whom I am well pleased.’ This remarkable interposition of the providence of God, at the opening of his public ministry, very naturally succeeded those remarkable interpositions which had happened about the time of his nativity: and they as naturally preceded the following remarkable events which happened in the progress of his history.

During the continuance of his public ministry, we meet with few extraordinary interpositions from the providence of God ; and the reason probably was this ; that the dignity and importance of his character, was in that period, sufficiently declared in a different manner, viz. by the extraordinary wisdom of his instructions, and the extraordinary works of power which he performed. By these Jesus ‘ bore witness of himself.’ When he first appeared on earth, it was in circumstances of indigence, meanness and contempt : God therefore judged it proper to attest his dignity at that period in the manner we have seen. When he suffered on the cross, and was buried in the grave, he appeared in circumstances of still greater meanness and contempt ; therefore the like extraordinary attestations were given by the providence of God, as we shall have occasion to observe in the sequel of this essay. But during the period of his public ministry, Jesus by his extraordinary wisdom, and his mighty works, ‘ bore witness of himself :’ on this account, it is probable, we meet with fewer attestations of his dignity from Providence, in this period of his life.

There are however some instances of this kind which deserve our notice ; such as,

1st, His transfiguration on the mount in

the presence of three of his disciples. * The change that was made upon the figure and appearance of his body, for ' His face did shine ' as the sun, and his raiment was white as ' light ;' the presence of Moses and Elias who attended him as his ministers ; the voice which proceeded from the cloud, announcing him to be the Son of God in whom the Father was pleased, and that men should therefore hear him : these extraordinary events sufficiently declared that Jesus was the messenger and Son of God ; that his office was superior to that of Moses and the prophets ; and that all preceeding revelations were to give place, and to receive their full accomplishment in the message which he brought from God. The apostle Peter hath accordingly referred to this occurrence in the history of Jesus, as one of the most remarkable attestations of his glory. † ' We were eye witnesses of his ' majesty, for he received from God the Father, honour and glory, when there came ' such a voice to him from the excellent glory, ' This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well ' pleased. And this voice which came from ' heaven we heard when we were with him in ' the holy mount.'

* Mat. xvii. 2.

† 2 Peter i. 16.

2dly, A circumstance of the like nature is recorded by St. John.† Jesus on a near prospect of his last sufferings, and of his death upon the cross, had signified in the presence of his friends, that his soul was troubled, and that he wished (if it were possible) to be delivered from the melancholy prospect; but that nevertheless he was willing, nay desirous, that in all events the name of his heavenly Father should be glorified: on this a voice proceeded from the heavens in answer to his prayer, ‘I have glorified my name, and will glorify it again.’ Then Jesus told his friends, that this voice was heard, not on his account, but theirs: the reason probably of which event was this; the friends of Jesus were at that time very much astonished and distressed, when they observed the trouble and depression of his spirit, and began to apprehend that he was soon to undergo some extraordinary humiliation and distress, in place of that external dominion and authority which they had been looking for: and Jesus knew they would be still more astonished and distressed when a little after this, they should see him wickedly betrayed, and put to a dishonourable and miserable death. This appearance therefore of the providence of God, was made with

† John xii. 27.

great propriety, and with great compassion to the friends of Jesus, whose faith and confidence might have altogether failed, had they not been at that time supported by this singular event.

We are next to consider the third period which was marked in the history of Jesus, viz. That of his last sufferings and death upon the cross. If it be considered that Jesus was to suffer an ignominious and painful death upon the cross, and there, as he himself expresses it, 'To give his life a ransom for many;' it will not be expected that the providence of God should at this period remarkably interpose in his behalf. It behoved him, then to suffer all that ignominy and distress, which was necessary to accomplish the purposes of Providence in appointing him to suffer as the propitiation for the sins of men, and to give his life a ransom for the world. Hence Jesus called this period the * hour and power of darkness, and accounted thereby for the prevailing influence and triumph of his adversaries. † He was at that time to suffer 'From Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel gathered together, whatsoever the hand and the council of God had determined before to be done.'

* Luke xxii. 53.

† Acts iv. 27. Digitized by Google

Nevertheless even in this hour of darkness several extraordinary interpositions were made by the providence of God to attest the dignity of him, who ignominiously suffered and died upon the cross. The sun was marvelously eclipsed, and the earth was darkened, the vail of the temple rent, the earth trembled, the rocks burst, sepulchres were opened, and several of the saints arose and went into Jerusalem. By these events God intended to declare, that Jesus notwithstanding his present ignominy and distress, was a person of the highest dignity; that he was the messenger and Son of God, as he himself had signified. The captain of the guard who attended the execution did accordingly observe these strange events with a serious surprise, † saying, ‘ Truly this was the Son of God;’ and many others § ‘ smote upon their breasts,’ in token of their astonishment and anguish at the sight.

During the period we are now considering, two very singular attestations of a different kind were given to the innocence and dignity of Jesus, which though they don’t strictly come within the plan of this essay, do however merit our attention in this place; I mean the attestations which were given by Judas, by whom Jesus was betrayed; and by Pilate,

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by whom he was condemned. There is something exceedingly remarkable in each of them.

Judas had been a constant witness and companion of our Saviour's life, and a preacher of his gospel. By him nevertheless Jesus was betrayed into the hands of those who waited for a proper opportunity of apprehending him, and putting him to death. This treatment from one of his particular confidants and friends, behoved at first to have a most unfavourable influence upon his character, and to confirm the prejudices of his countrymen against him as a wicked and designing man: and undoubtedly had there been any marks of artifice or wickedness in the life of Jesus, Judas would have readily and joyfully proclaimed them, with a view to justify himself. The secret therefore, if there had been any in the case, would have now come out, and his enemies have had it in their power to baffle all his projects. But this was so far from being the consequence of Judas' perfidy, that by its means a very singular testimony was given to his masters innocence and dignity. Judas was unable to recollect a single instance of iniquity or artifice in the conduct and designs of Jesus: nay the simplicity and virtue of his life appeared to him on recollection in so strong a light, that the remembrance of his guilt and baseness in betraying him, pierced his

conscience with insufferable anguish. * He returned the price for which he had betrayed him, declared in the most public manner his own baseness and injustice in betraying him; and in order to get rid of his intolerable anguish and remorse went and hanged himself.

Something similar to this happened in the behaviour of his judge. † Pontius Pilate after he had examined and conversed with Jesus, and had heard all the evidence against him which his accusers were able to produce, judicially and solemnly declared his opinion of his innocence, and employed his utmost influence and art to prevail with his accusers to consent to his release: nor could he be brought to condemn him, till ‡ he saw from the factiousness and tumults of the populace that his own safety and authority might be in danger by preserving him; and when he was in this manner, constrained to condemn him to be crucified, he added to the sentence a weak superstitious attempt to transfer the infamy and guilt of putting him to death, from himself to his accusers, ‘ He took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.’

This is perhaps one of the most singular oc-

currences in history. A judge from the bench of justice publicly declares the innocence of the man whom he publicly condemns. Pilate, one would think, might have at least feigned a conviction of his guilt, in order to conceal his own injustice; and in any other case a prudent man would have acted in this manner. But he had, it would appear, such a strong conviction of the innocence of Jesus, and such a deep impression of his dignity, that (though an artful man) he was not in the present case, able to refrain from declaring in a public and judicial manner, his conviction of his innocence and dignity, at the very time that he publicly and judicially condemned him to be crucified.

We are now come to the last period in the history of Jesus, viz. That which succeeded to his death, till he finally departed from this world and returned unto his Father.

The grave is the last stage of human weakness, wherein all the pride and glory of this world sinks into disgrace. But how ignominious soever in the usual course of nature, it was the scene of honour to the Lord Jesus Christ; for it was the place of his glorious resurrection. Hence the prophet Isaiah prophesying of his resurrection, says, * ‘ His rest

‘ shall be glorious:’ and the apostle Paul, †
 ‘ He was declared to be the Son of God
 ‘ with power by the resurrection from the
 ‘ dead.’ This event indeed with the cir-
 cumstances with which it was accompanied,
 declared him to be the Son of God, with a
 very convincing evidence. When the disciples
 saw him and conversed with him after he had
 risen from the grave, when he assured them
 that he had been raised by the mighty power
 of God, to the end that his innocence and
 dignity, and the truth of the gospel might be
 fully ascertained; it was impossible for them
 not to be convinced, that he was the messen-
 ger and Son of God, as he had from the be-
 ginning declared himself to be.

If we add to the event itself the circumstan-
 ces with which it was accompanied, it becomes
 a still stronger demonstration of his innocence
 and dignity. The resurrection was in conse-
 quence of his own promise and prediction to
 his friends, and after he had informed them,
 that he would put the decision of his cause on
 the truth of this event. It happened too in
 opposition to the most artful and strenuous
 precautions of his enemies. ‡ They had or-
 dered a stone, a seal, and a guard of soldiers to
 be set upon the sepulchre in order to prevent

† Rom. i. 4.

§ Mat. xxvii. 62.

a fraud: and these precautions, no doubt, would have been effectual, had Jesus been a deceiver of the people; but they were but weak expedients when employed against the wisdom and the power of God. Instead of answering their foolish and malicious design, they remarkably confirmed the truth of that event, which they were intended either to prevent, or to conceal. * Add the earthquake with which the resurrection was accompanied, the presence of the angels who rolled away the stone and sat upon the sepulchre; and the astonishment of the soldiers, when they saw their glorious appearance. These circumstances made the resurrection of Jesus from the dead so much the more authentic and decisive evidence of his being the Son of God.

Jesus having continued with his friends for a considerable time after his resurrection from the dead, ascended in a visible manner in their presence to the Father. † ‘ And he led them
 ‘ out as far as Bethany, and he lift up his
 ‘ hands and blessed them. And it came to
 ‘ pass as he blessed them, he was parted from
 ‘ them, and carried up to heaven. ‡ And
 ‘ while they looked stedfastly toward heaven,
 ‘ as he went up, behold, two men stood by
 ‘ them in white apparel; which also said, Ye

‘ men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up in-
‘ to heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken
‘ up from you into heaven, shall so come in
‘ like manner as ye have seen him go into
‘ heaven. And they worshipped him, and re-
‘ turned to Jerusalem with great joy.’ His
final departure from the world in this extra-
ordinary manner, was probably directed by
the providence of God, with a view to give
his friends the most sensible, and convincing
demonstration of his total conquest over
death, and that he had the power of raising
them to everlasting life. By this event was re-
markably confirmed the truth of what he had
declared to his disciples. * ‘ That it was the
‘ will of him that sent him, that every one
‘ who seeth the Son, and believeth on him,
‘ may have everlasting life, and that he would
‘ raise him up at the last day. That he came
‘ forth from the Father, and was come into
‘ the world; and that again he would leave the
‘ world, and go to the Father.’

Jesus had come into the world in a very
different manner from what the rest of the
sons of Adam do. It was not by the original
condition and law of his existence, but by his
own voluntary choice, upon a special emer-
gency, and to serve an extraordinary purpose

in the providence of God ; therefore after he had served the purpose of his coming to the world, he returned immediately, and in an extraordinary manner, unto God, from whom he came. By his leaving the world in this manner, he was no less remarkably distinguished from the rest of mankind, than he had been by the manner in which he had come into it ; and by each of these events he was declared to be the Son of God.

The extraordinary circumstances which accompanied this event, add to its significance ; such as the * appearance of the angels to the disciples who were present, and the voice which proceeded from the clouds declaring him to be the person, who should come again from heaven in the same glorious manner, to be the judge of all the earth. Hereby, were the friends of Jesus sufficiently assured, that he was approved by God in every thing which he had said and done, and was therefore readmitted with honour into the heavenly world. † They accordingly after his ascension ‘ Worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.’

These were the extraordinary interpositions of Providence, by which Jesus was declared to be the messenger and Son of God ; and the

following observation may be made on this part of the sacred history; that if Jesus is supposed to be the person whom he is described to be in the history of the gospel; (and surely no one can say it was impossible for such a person to exist, or to come into this world) if he is the only ' Begotten, and eternal Son ' of God; if he came into this world by an immediate commission from the Father, to enlighten, purify, and redeem the human race, if mens reception of him as the Son of God, and their obedience to the gospel, be of such importance to their virtue and happiness, as they are there described to be; from all this it is natural to infer, that the extraordinary facts which have been mentioned, are not so unlikely, or so difficult to be believed, as their marvellous, and extraordinary nature would at first sight lead us to conceive. The unusual nature of these events, and their being so different from what happens in the ordinary course of things, gives them an improbable appearance, and with some persons totally destroys their credibility. But it ought to be considered, that in the history of such a person as Jesus is described to be, they are probable events, and such as we might naturally expect to meet with in the records of his life. Their improbability is removed by the peculiar circumstances of the case. The appear

ance of such an extraordinary messenger from God, behoved to be declared in some singular and extraordinary manner by his providence: and it will puzzle any man to imagine in what more significant and certain manner this could have been done, than by the marvellous events which have been mentioned: nor will it be easy to avoid the following alternative, either to affirm that it was impossible for such a person, as Jesus is described to be, to have existed, and to have come into this world; or to allow, that the marvellous events recorded in the gospel were the probable effects of his appearance, and such as we might expect to find in the history of his life.

It may be added to the preceding observation, that it is exceedingly improbable, and difficult to be believed, that the writers of the gospel could of themselves have invented such a series of events, so admirably suited to the character and office of the Lord Jesus Christ; still more improbable, that they could have dared to appeal to the knowledge of the public for the truth of these events; and most of all improbable, that on this appeal, they could have made one, not to say innumerable converts to the gospel, had not the evidence of their truth been entirely incontestable; especially when it is considered that the writers of the

gospel had to combat all those principles in the human mind, that oppose in the strongest manner, the belief of every religious innovation.

SECTION II.

Of the discovery which Jesus gave of his character, and office, by the miracles which he wrought.

• **I**N the following part of this essay, we are to consider those marks of dignity and merit in the Lord Jesus Christ, which proceeded more immediately from himself, and were the effects of his own extraordinary wisdom, power and goodness. By the events already mentioned, the Father ‘ bore witness of him.’ By those which we are now to mention, ‘ he bore witness of himself.’

As God did not mark the dignity of his Son by the external honours and distinctions of this world, so Jesus Christ himself did not choose to be distinguished, or to mark the merit and importance of his character, by any of those talents and abilities, by which the ambition, and the pride of men make them fond to be distinguished.

’Tis by extensive science or inventions in useful arts, by skill in politics, or arms, and the like accomplishments, that men strive to acquire the admiration of their fellow men, and to raise themselves to dignity and eminence; and in each of these, it must be own-

ed, there is an excellence and merit, which naturally raises admiration and respect. There is at the same time, a different kind of excellence, which though less generally admired, deserves the highest admiration and esteem, viz. that which lies in the virtuous and benevolent affections of the heart; and which, without soliciting the honours and distinctions of the world, is satisfied with the secret honour and reward which arises from itself. Those virtuous and benevolent affections of the heart, when they are directed by sufficient wisdom, and supported by sufficient power, and are exerted in some great and extensive sphere of life, constitute the highest excellence, and exhibit to our view the most respectable and amiable character.

At the same time it ought to be observed, that these good affections of the heart may be directed and applied to two different purposes: 1st, They may lead a man to employ the power and wisdom of which he is possessed, in promoting the external and temporary interests of mankind, arising from the outward conveniencies, or ornaments of life; or, 2^{dly}, They may lead him to promote those internal and immortal interests of men, which are founded on the wisdom, piety and virtue of their hearts. The first of these interests are promoted by the literary, the mechanical, the

commercial, or the political arts of life; the latter are promoted by moral, and religious instructions, and by virtuous example. When the kind affections of the heart are directed and applied to the last of these ends, they are then undoubtedly in the noblest direction: and if, under this direction, they are supported by sufficient power and wisdom, they form a character of the highest merit and importance.

Now herein Jesus placed the merit of his character; neglecting those inferior kinds of excellence which gratify the curiosity and vanity of man, or are subservient only to the outward ornament, and happiness of life; overlooking the distinctions which arise from science, eloquence, politics, and arms; he chose to be distinguished only by the piety and goodness of his heart, and by such exertions of his power and wisdom, as were requisite either to ensure, or to extend the effects of his benignity: and the blessings which he laboured to spread among mankind, were not the external temporary blessings of this life; but those internal and immortal blessings which proceed from wisdom, piety and virtue. It was the business of his life, to establish upon this foundation, the present tranquillity and happiness of men, and their future, and immortal welfare in the kingdom of his Father.

That this was the peculiar excellence and merit of his character, will easily appear from the history of his life. The Evangelists have not indeed attempted to give a description of his character, or to draw it in form. No effort of this kind appears in the history of the gospel. They have only given a simple narration of the conduct and transactions of his life, and left the world from thence to form their judgment of his character. When they relate his most deserving and illustrious actions, they do it without any expressions of applause, and in the same calm and artless manner in which they have recorded the least important circumstances of his life.

There seems to be in this respect, a simplicity of manner peculiar to the writers of the gospel; and it gives a strong presumption of their candour and sincerity. Historians who write the lives of eminent and illustrious men, (how candid soever in their narratives) are not able to conceal their prepossessions in their favour, or the art which they employ to embellish and exalt the merit of their character. But a simple narrative of facts, without the smallest effort in the writer to embellish them, or to set them in any other light than what they must appear in, to every one, after they are simply told, gives a very strong presumption both of the knowledge and veracity

of the writer, and that without being heated or misled by his own imagination, he hath given an unaffected recital of real facts, of which he had the most undoubted certainty.

In order then to ascertain the character of Jesus Christ, we must enquire into the measures of his conduct, as recorded in the history of the gospel: and from these we may be able to form the most exact and certain judgment of it; for it is strongly marked in every circumstance and action of his life.

There is in every character, consistent with itself, some ruling principle or passion, which gives it its peculiar distinction: and in order to perceive the different parts of which it is composed, in their proper light, we must consider them in their connexion with this ruling principle. Attempting in this manner to ascertain the character of Jesus Christ, it will appear from the records of the gospel, that the ruling principle of his life was a compassionate concern for the miseries of men; especially those fatal and eternal miseries which flow from ignorance of God, depravity and guilt, together with an ardent, generous desire to restore them to the opposite felicity, arising from religious wisdom and immortal life; animated in this desire, by the thought, that by promoting these important and everlasting interests of men, he did the will of God, and

executed the commission which was given him by his Father. Prompted by this principle he had come into this world. 'He came to seek and save that which was lost: to minister and give his life a ransom for many: to save his people from their sins: that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life:' and having been determined by this motive, to come into the world, he was directed by its influence in every instance of his conduct. This we shall find was his distinguishing and peculiar character, by which we must explain all the particular transactions of his life, and place them in their proper light.

Before we attempt to trace the influence of this principle, in the measures of his conduct, it may be proper to observe with relation to the principle itself; that it equally referred to the will of God, and the happiness of men; and that Jesus by an equal attention and regard to each of these, was directed in the whole proceedings of his life. In all those compassionate and generous endeavours to promote the virtue and immortal happiness of men, in which he spent his life; we shall find him constantly expressing a devout attention to the will of God, and doing good with a peculiar cheerfulness and zeal, because it was the work which his heavenly Father had given him to do. The

truth of this remark sufficiently appears from the records of the gospel. It is needless to adduce particular passages in proof of it. The reader may only be put in mind of the manner in which he began his public ministry, and in which he reflected on it, towards the conclusion of his life. When he made his first attempt to instruct the people of Jerusalem, he informed his friends, * ‘ That he was then about his Father’s business.’ When near the close of life, he reflected on his former conduct, he addressed his heavenly Father in this manner; † ‘ I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.’ Thus, was the spirit of devotion and humanity, equally expressed in the character and life of Jesus Christ.—He was indeed the most devout person that ever lived upon the earth. An affectionate and serious sense of God, and a reverend attention to his providence and will, were expressed in every word that proceeded from his mouth, and in every action of his life. ‡ His frequent retirements from the world, to converse with God in prayer. § The devout addresses which he made to him by prayer, in the presence of his friends. ** The exhortations which he gave them to

* Luke ii. 49. † John xvii. 4. ‡ Mat. xiv. 23. Mark i. 35. Luke v. 16. vi. 12. § Mat. xi. 25. John xi. 41. xii. 27. xvii. 1. ** Mat. vii. 7. Luke xi. 1. xviii. 1.

be frequent and importunate in prayer. His directions to make God the supreme object of their * love, their † fear, their ‡ trust, § his perfections the pattern of their imitation; and his approbation ** the ultimate and highest aim of all their actions: above all, his patient and perfect resignation to the will of God, when he suffered by the order of his providence; these sufficiently discover the devotion of his character.—Jesus was at the same time a person of the most benevolent and active spirit; for he spent his life in offices of mercy, and ‘went about continually doing good.’

This remarkable coalition of devotion and humanity, proceeded from those amiable and joyful views which he always entertained of the goodness of his heavenly Father. His devotion towards him, was all of it an exercise of love, proceeding from the knowledge of his goodness, and directing him to serve him, under the delightful apprehension of a merciful and loving Father. From this idea, he perceived that nothing could be so grateful an expression of his piety to God, as his doing offices of mercy towards men, whom he considered as his family and children. By this means,

* Mat. xxii. 37. † Luke xii. 4. ‡ Mat. vi. 25.

§ Mat. v. 44. ** Mat. vi. 1.

his piety was equally removed from a monkish, fanatical retirement from the world, and a weak superstitious attachment to external forms. Devotion and humanity, coinciding in their dictates and demands, directed him with equal influence, in every action of his life : and by that same tenor of conduct, by which he did the will of God, he promoted the immortal interests of men. In this light he himself puts his character, and the motive of his life. * ‘ I came down from heaven, not to do
 ‘ mine own will, but the will of him that sent
 ‘ me. And this is the Father’s will which sent
 ‘ me, that of all which he hath given me, I
 ‘ should lose nothing, but should raise it up a-
 ‘ gain at the last day. And that every one
 ‘ which seeth the Son, and believeth on him,
 ‘ may have everlasting life.’ This great circumstance completed the merit of his character, and gave the virtue of his life, an elevation and stability which no opposition was able to control.

In considering the influence of this important principle on the particular transactions of Jesus’ life, we are chiefly to attend to his deportment, during the course of his public ministry. His character was not fully manifested, till he entered on this period of his life.

There were however, a few incidents in his history prior to this period, which may merit our attention.

1st, When Jesus was but a child about twelve years of age, * he went into the temple, and placing himself among the doctors of the church, discoursed in such a manner on the doctrines of religion, as raised the admiration and surprise of all who heard him. From this circumstance it appears; 1st, That Jesus even in the earlier years of his life, possessed the same extraordinary wisdom, which he afterwards more fully manifested in his riper years. 2dly, That, had it been his choice he might, even at that early period of his life, have appeared publickly in the world, with distinguished honour and applause.

2dly, About the same time † when his parents reprehended him for leaving them without their knowledge; though he asserted his prerogative as the Son of God, yet he submitted to their authority, and lived with them in obscurity and servile labour, till he was about thirty years of age.

This part of his history gives an opening to his character, which merits our attention. In that early and active period of life, it was extremely singular in Jesus, to retire into obscu-

* Luke ii. 46.

† Luke ii. 48.

rity and servile labour, with the consciousness of such ability and wisdom, as might have raised him to the highest influence among mankind. This long and mean retirement, Jesus nevertheless readily submitted to, because 'his time was not come;' the period fixed by Providence for the commencement of his ministry, was not yet arrived. Hereby the supreme and ruling motive of his life, began early to appear: and from this circumstance of his history, we may draw a strong presumption of the disinterestedness and purity of his designs. Had he been directed by interested and ambitious motives; or had it been his plan, to raise himself to external grandeur and prosperity; it was a preposterous and foolish choice, to live for thirty years in servile labour and obscurity. He should have been employed in acquiring the advantages of human art, and the knowledge of the world; or by the display of those uncommon talents of which he was possessed, even in his earlier years, opening to himself the road to future honour and prosperity, instead of working with his hands at the business of a carpenter. This circumstance withal discovers that the wisdom and the mighty works, which he afterwards displayed, were not the acquisitions of industry and art, but the immediate gifts of God. Hence the Jews, not apprised of his pe-

gular character, very sensibly expressed their wonder and surprise, * ‘ Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works ? ‘ Is not this the carpenter’s son ? † How knoweth this man letters, having never learned ? ’ The answer to these questions was given by our Saviour himself ; and it is the only satisfying account that could be given ; ‘ My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.’

Similar to this retirement and obscurity, was the choice which Jesus made at the beginning of his public ministry, of a few illiterate and simple men, to be his particular confidants and friends, and the publishers of his religion. This was a very ill directed choice, if he had the interests and honours of this world in view ; but was perfectly well suited to his plan of enlightning the understandings, and purifying the hearts of men, by those religious, and moral truths, which are not learned by the wisdom of this world, but by the ‘ Demonstration of the Spirit, and power of ‘ God : ’ and which are best received by the simple and upright in heart, who are not spoiled by the vain philosophy and pride of men. It was probably with a reference to this choice, that he thanked his Father in the manner we are told he did, † ‘ I thank thee,

‘ O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, be-
 ‘ cause thou hast hid these things from the
 ‘ wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to
 ‘ babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed
 ‘ good in thy sight.’

Having made these few remarks on the earlier periods of our Saviour’s life, we are now to consider the account which is given of his public ministry.

In this period of his history, two things chiefly demand our attention.

1st, The extraordinary works, which he is recorded to have done.

2dly, The more ordinary incidents and transactions of his life.

Jesus called himself the messenger of God, and asserted, that what he taught, in order to establish the immortal interests of men, was by his special appointment and authority. Beside the essential wisdom, and importance of the doctrine which he taught; it behoved him therefore to convince the world of the truth of his commission, and awaken mens attention to the message which he brought from God, by some proper credentials, and proofs of his authority. These (added to the extraordinary interpositions of the providence of God, already mentioned) were the miracles which he wrought, such as his giving eyes to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the

diseased, reason and wisdom to those who were deprived of them, his calming the winds and seas, raising the dead, and the like. How far these mighty works were a sufficient proof of his divine commission, it is not our present purpose particularly to enquire. It may be proper only to observe, that our best and most natural apprehensions of the providence of God, lead us to conclude, that he would never give to any one, a power to do such mighty works as Jesus did, on a solemn invocation of his name, and appeal to his authority; whilst however he had no commission from him; and whilst the doctrine which he thus confirmed by those natural marks of his authority, was a falsehood and imposture. On this supposition, we behoved to think, that the merciful creator of the world, instead of being disposed to enlighten and redeem the human race, and lead them in the way to everlasting life, was disposed to leave them in inextricable uncertainty; nay to set, to an imposture and deceit, what the common sense of mankind leads them to receive as the most authentic mark of his authority. Under the power of this natural apprehension, Nicodemus, a man of learning and authority among the Jews, addressed our Saviour in this sensible and candid manner, * ‘ Rabbi, thou art

‘ a teacher come from God, for no man can
 ‘ do those miracles which thou doest, except
 ‘ God be with him.’

Without entring any farther into the proof of Christ’s authority, from the miracles which he wrought, it is more particularly to our present purpose, to take notice of the manner in which they were performed, and the end to which he directed and applied them. It appears from the whole history of the gospel, that Jesus wrought his mighty works, with that same benevolent and merciful design, which had brought him to this world, and which directed him in all the other transactions of his life, viz. that by the aid of their authority, he might serve the interests of religion and virtue in this world, and ensure the everlasting happiness of men. No instance can be given wherein it appears that any of his miracles were wrought to create astonishment, or to raise an useless admiration of himself; far less to be an engine of ambition, or establish any secular interest in this world. Jesus by the same power and wisdom, by which he wrought his mighty works, might undoubtedly have raised himself to the highest pitch of influence among mankind. By that wisdom by which ‘ He knew all men, and what was in man;’ and by which he foresaw the uncertain and remote events of Providence: he might have

easily explored the utmost extent of science, or penetrated into the deepest arts of human policy. By that power, by which he cured those diseased and miserable persons, who applied to his compassion, he might have easily surmounted every obstacle that could oppose the most aspiring and immoderate ambition. But no effort of this kind appears in the life of Jesus. He was fully satisfied with such exertions of his power and wisdom, as were best adapted to demonstrate his authority as a teacher sent from God, and to convey the instructions of the gospel with proper efficacy to the heart of man. To this purpose were all the miracles which he wrought directed and applied: and to their authority, considered in this light, he constantly appealed.*

The nature of the miracles which Jesus wrought, gives a further opening to his character. Whilst they were employed by him as means of promoting mens future and immortal happiness, they at the same time, promoted their felicity and comfort in this present world, and were the most agreeable expressions of his mercy to the bodies and lives of men. In this light they are considered by the apostle Peter, † where he observes, that ‘ Je-

* Luke vii. 19. John x. 25, 37. Luke vi. 24. † Acts x. 38.

‘*Jesus went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.*’ The Jews foolishly insisted that Jesus should demonstrate his authority, by producing useless wonders in the air, * which they called, a sign from heaven; and some of his disciples with greater folly † desired him to employ his power in destroying the lives of his opposers. He nevertheless invariably employed his power in doing offices of mercy: and the writers of his life observe, that as he made a general appeal to his miracles, as the proofs of his divine commission, so he was induced to work them on the particular occasions which occurred, from compassion on those miserable persons for whose immediate benefit and comfort they were done. †

The miracles of Christ being of such a beneficial and useful nature, suited the spirit of his office as the Saviour of the world, with a singular propriety. At the beginning of his ministry, they were the most agreeable indications he could give of his merciful designs, and were just such works of power, as we might naturally expect from a person of his character. He had come from God with a commission to save the souls of men, which ‘*had*

* Mat. xii. 38. † Luke ix. 54. † Mat. xiv. 14.
xv. 32. xx. 34. Mark i. 41.

' been lost ;' and the mighty works by which he shewed his power to execute the gracious commission, were such as saved the lives of men, and promoted their security and comfort in this world. They were hereby fitted in an admirable manner, to engage our confidence, as well as to raise our admiration ; and at once exhibit him to our view, as the powerful, and merciful Saviour of this world. In this light he put them to his friends, when they desired him to exert his power in the punishment of the Samaritans ; * ' Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of ; for the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.' In this exertion of his power, Jesus copied from the works of God : ' For what things soever the Father doth, these doth the Son likewise.' The regular and stated operations of the providence of God, are equal expressions of his goodness, as of his power. If on some particular occasions he seemingly departs from this amiable plan, as in earthquakes, pestilences, inundations, and the like terrible events ; yet these but rarely happen, when compared with the beneficial influence of Providence in the usual course of nature : and we have reason to be-

* Luke ix. 34.

lieve, they are ordered with a merciful design of awakening men's attention to the hand of God, when it cannot be done by the gentler operations of his goodness. In like manner were the miracles which Jesus wrought, equal expressions of his goodness, as of his power. If at any time he appears to have departed from this plan, it was only, in one or two inconsiderable instances, * in his blasting the barren fig-tree, and permitting the devils to destroy the herd of swine: and these, we have reason to believe, were done, with the merciful design of admonishing the world, that he had power to punish the wickedness of men, when they would not be reclaimed, as he had power to pardon and to bless them, in case of their repentance, and obedience to the gospel.

The miracles of Christ, considered in this light, were withal, the most natural and proper specimens, that could be given of that authority, and influence, which he claimed as the Saviour of the world. They were exertions of that same influence, on the present and external interests of the human nature; which he declared himself to be possessed of, with relation to its future and immortal interests in the kingdom of his Father.—When he called

himself the light of this world, sent from heaven, to lead mankind to the knowledge of the living God, and the conditions of their future happiness, as the subjects of his kingdom; he opened their eyes and ears, to lead them to the knowledge of the works of God, and to ensure their happiness and comfort in this present life: nay restored to such as were deprived of it, that reason, and intelligence, which is the distinguishing prerogative of the human nature, and the necessary basis of its happiness.—When, by his grace, and truth, he offered to purify the hearts of men, and to re-establish the internal virtue and perfection of their souls, he cured the most inveterate disorders of their bodies.—When he asserted his authority to forgive the sins of men, he delivered them from the miseries, which had befallen them as the consequences of their sins.—When he claimed the power of raising up his friends to everlasting life, he raised up Lazarus his friend, and others from the dead, and arose himself, according to his promise.—By these, and the like extraordinary works (which Jesus wrought at pleasure, and on every proper occasion that occurred) he discovered to the world, that he had the sovereign direction of all the present interests of mankind in his hand; and thereby gave the strongest evidence, which the nature of the case admitted

of, that he was also qualified to be the Saviour of their souls; and was equally disposed, and able, to ensure their everlasting interests beyond the grave. 'That all power was given to him in heaven, and in earth: and that he had the words of everlasting life.'

SECTION III.

Christ's moral and religious character more particularly considered and explained from the conduct of his life.

HAVING considered the miracles of Christ, as the first discovery which he gave of his character and office, as the messenger of God, we are in the next place, to consider the more ordinary incidents, and transactions of his life.—In this part of the essay, it is proposed to enquire more particularly into his moral and religious character, and with this view, to trace through the conduct of his life, the influence of that important principle, which, as was observed before, gave the peculiar colour, and distinction to his character.

Jesus having asserted his commission as the messenger of God, began his public teaching with a solemn exhortation to repentance, or that change of mind, without which, he knew, impure and sinful creatures, such as men, would not be able to attain that happiness, and immortality, which it was the purpose of his mission to this world, to bring

them to. * ‘Jesus began to say, repent, for
‘the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

Soon after he had thus opened his commission, we are informed, † that when he went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom, ‘He saw the multitudes, and was moved with
‘compassion on them, because they fainted,
‘and were scattered abroad, as sheep having
‘no shepherd. They fainted,’ i. e. they were ignorant of, and unsupported by those truths of God, which give nourishment and strength, and comfort to the soul of man; ‘They were
‘scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd,’ i. e. they had no sufficient instructor, to lead them in the way to happiness and immortality. That this was the sense of these expressions, appears from the gospel of St. Mark, ‡ where we are informed, that being thus moved with compassion, because the people were as sheep having no shepherd, ‘He therefore taught them many things.’ This circumstance at the beginning of our Saviour’s public ministry, naturally suggests the following remarks.

1st, That the first and strongest point of light in which he viewed mankind was that, of their being rational and immortal crea-

* Mat. iv. 17.

† Mat. ix. 36.

‡ Mark vi. 34.

tures, capable of moral and religious instructions, and of attaining by their influence, to everlasting life.

2dly, That viewing them in this point of light, the first emotion which he felt concerning them, was pity to their souls; because for want of moral and religious instructions, they were wandering from that rational, virtuous and immortal happiness, for which their nature was designed.

3dly, That as this compassion to the souls of men, discovered a disposition that was excellent and amiable, in its own nature, so it suited with a very great propriety, the purpose of his coming to this world, and gave a most agreeable indication of what was to be the ruling principle and motive of his after life. The Evangelist informs us, * that immediately before he had expressed his compassion on the multitude, he had been healing all manner of disease and sickness among them: and very probably the people as they stood around him, were expressing their gratitude and joy, on the occasion. This, to any other person, would have given compleat satisfaction and delight. Jesus however had too deep an insight into the interests of human nature, to be satisfied with these events. He knew that

the diseases of the body, and all the visible calamities of life, were but trifling, when compared with those unseen and everlasting miseries, which arise from ignorance and guilt, or, what he calls the loss of the immortal soul.

He knew that the people whom he saw around him, rejoicing in the effects of his beneficent and mighty works, and acknowledging their obligations to their benefactor, were created for enjoyments of a different, and more important nature; that he himself had come from heaven to lead them to these nobler enjoyments; but that they were so unfortunate as not to know, either the nature of that happiness for which they were designed, or the method of attaining it; nor had hitherto met with any wise or faithful teacher, to conduct them to it.—Jesus beholding the multitudes in this uncommon, but affecting light, had compassion on them, says the Evangelist, (alluding to the tenderness and care of a faithful shepherd). * ‘ Because they were as sheep

* This image would convey a stronger apprehension of the state of Jesus’ mind to the Jews who lived in the days of the Evangelist, than it does to us. The pastoral life was then in great honour and esteem; the riches of their greatest men consisted chiefly in their flocks, and they placed their honour and delight in attending them, and preparing proper nourishment and pasture for them. Whatever therefore concerned the in-

‘ having no shepherd.’ He saw them straying from the path that leads to happiness and immortality, entered on the path that leads to everlasting misery; and without any wise and faithful monitor to stop them in the fatal progress: viewing them in this affecting light, his heart was moved with a divine compassion, and therefore he proceeded to the work, for which he came into this world, ‘ He began to teach them many things.’

The whole succeeding labours of his life, were agreeable to this beginning of his public ministry. It was his only business and project, when he appeared upon the public stage, that by means of his instructions and example, men might be recovered from ignorance and wickedness, and conducted in the path of piety and wisdom, to eternal life. In this blessed work, he laboured with a zeal so peculiar to

interest or safety of their flocks, affected them in a very sensible and tender manner.—Virgil in his first Eclogue, makes Meliboeus speak in a very feeling manner to his flock, and much in the way that a tender parent would address his children.
Line 75.

Itē meae, pecus quondam felix, itē capellae,

Non ego vos posthac—

This affection of a shepherd to his flock, must have been in ancient times, of a much more soft and tender kind, than we can easily conceive, when alluding to it our Saviour could say, John x. 11. ‘ The good shepherd layeth down his life for the flock.’

himself, and discovered such indifference about the interests of this world, such a perfect resignation, and tranquillity under the adversities of life; and such invariable benignity and meekness under the highest provocation, from the wickedness of men, as mark his character in a very striking and distinguished manner.

The ruling principle of his life, was indeed so prevalent and strong, that in no circumstance it would admit of any opposition or control, either from the weakness of humanity, or the malice of the world. Superior to these, in the most difficult and trying circumstances, he proceeded with uninterrupted constancy and goodness, to do the will of God, and promote the everlasting happiness of men. In this light let us take a view of some of the principal transactions of his life.

In the first place we may observe, that the ruling principle and motive of his life, was totally superior to the animal infirmities of the human nature, and the strong necessities to which they make us liable. The interview which he had with the woman of Samaria, recorded by St. John, * merits our particular attention in this light.

When Jesus entered on this interview, he

had been exhausted by a tedious and painful journey through the country of Samaria, and had sat down on Jacob's well to rest himself, and probably to drink of the water of the well; the disciples having gone to buy provision in a neighbouring village. The person with whom he had this interview, was a Samaritan, with whom the Jews, from a national and religious antipathy, had no communication; she was withal a person of a mean and worthless character, which occasioned the surprise, and displeasure of his disciples, when they found him engaged in conversation with her. But none of these circumstances, however disagreeable, could prevent his embracing, in an ardent manner, the opportunity which was then given him by Providence, of promoting the instruction and salvation of immortal souls. The answer which he made to the disciples, when they desired him to eat of the provisions they had brought, gives a strong discovery of the state and temper of his mind, * ' I have
' meat to eat that ye know not of; my meat is
' to do the will of him that sent me, and to
' finish his work;' i. e. nature calls, as ye suppose, for some refreshment and support; but I observe a different call, and feel a different,

* John iv. 34.

and a stronger inclination, even to do the will of God, by promoting the immortal happiness of men: I am conscious of a pleasure from the indulgence of this nobler inclination, superior to what I can receive from partaking of the food which ye have brought. ‘Are there not, (he adds) yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to the harvest;’ i. e. the husbandman rejoiceth in the prospect of the fruits of harvest, for a considerable time ere the season comes: I consider the instruction and salvation of immortal souls, with the same attention that the husbandman observes the product of his labour through the year: I observe at present, many souls around me, prepared and ready to receive the instructions which I brought from God: can I overlook this precious opportunity, or attend to any other business or avocation upon earth?—Thus, Jesus manifested his concern ‘To seek and save that which was lost.’ The joy which he expressed when he saw the multitudes ready to receive the instructions which he brought from God, exactly tallies with the pity which he had expressed, when he saw them fainting, scattered, and without a guide: and both equally proceeded

from the generous and amiable principle, from which he had been induced to come into this world.

2dly, The ruling principle of Jesus' life, was in like manner totally superior to the highest provocation he could meet with from the ingratitude and injustice of the world. Every one knows what a strong propensity there is in human nature, to resent, and retaliate the injuries we have received, or, at least, to desist from doing offices of kindness to those who have offended us, and persist in the offence. The benignity of Jesus, however, had so totally suppressed this violent propensity, that he not only continued to the end of life, to do the kindest offices for those, who maliciously hated and opposed him, but continued to do them, with the same pleasure and facility, as if no opposition had been given him.—* After he had performed an extraordinary cure, on a person that was blind and dumb, the common people drew a very natural conclusion, That he behoved to be the Christ. But the Pharisees immediately attempted to pervert this natural judgment of the people. They ascribed, with equal ignorance and malice, the cure which he had wrought, to a confederacy with Satan; and

laboured to make the populace believe, that, aided by the power of Satan, he was an instrument and promoter of his kingdom.—Nothing could be conceived more spiteful, or unjust. Had Jesus been directed by the selfish, and ambitious motives of the world; or by any other motive, than that of establishing the everlasting interests of men, his patience and goodness must have been intirely overcome, by this excessive malice and ingratitude: and from that time, he would have left these malicious and ungrateful men, to the consequences of their wickedness.—Jesus however still proceeded in his merciful endeavours to enlighten, and reclaim them: meek and gentle reasonings, and a calm appeal to the natural and common sense of mankind, were all the returns which he opposed to this provoking and malicious abuse. * ‘ Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation: and every house divided against itself, shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself: and if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.’ In this reply, Jesus manifested a composure and benigni-

ty, peculiar to himself, and shewed, that no degree of opposition from the malice, and ingratitude of men, was able to surmount the generous and ardent zeal, with which he laboured to promote their everlasting welfare. * 'He came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him.' Had Jesus done his own will, and followed the natural propension of the human heart, he would have chastised this ingratitude and malice, by his mighty power. But having come from heaven to do the will of God, by promoting the immortal happiness of men; he therefore overlooked their utmost malice and ingratitude, and in spite of it, proceeded with invariable benignity, to do the work for which he had been sent into this world. Many other instances of the like nature, will be easily observed by those who are acquainted with the history of the gospel.

3dly, The ruling principle of Jesus' life, was superior to all regard for the applause, or censure of the world. This regard is an innocent, and frequently an useful principle, in the present state of human nature. 'Tis nevertheless to be acknowledged, that the purest and most perfect virtue, is that which needs not the support or instigation of this

principle, but is able to support and satisfy itself, with the silent approbation of the conscious mind, and of the righteous judge of all the earth, independant of the eye and approbation of the world. * This sublime pitch of virtue, Jesus had prescribed to his disciples, and he set them an example of it in his life.—He wrought his most beneficent and glorious miracles, with a modesty, with a silence and reserve, which discovered an entire indifference about the observation of the world; and that his sole intention in them was, to glorify his Father, and promote the happiness of men. Hence it is observed by the Evangelist, that his behaviour, in this respect, answered the description of the Prophet, † ‘He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets,’ i. e. he shall not ambitiously contend for that honour and precedency, which any other man would have contended for, on the merit of such beneficent and mighty works. Nay, Jesus did not only overlook the honours and applauses of the world, when he was employed in doing the most important services for men; but did them, when he knew, that from the ignorance and prejudices of the world, he would incur the public hatred and contempt.

When we do good, says an antient philosopher, with a view to advance our own interest and honour, this does not imply, that there is any genuine principle of goodness in the heart. It is only when we do good, without any interested and ambitious design, and when we look for nothing in return. But to do good at the expence of our own interest and honour, and with the certain foresight, that our goodness will expose us to hatred and contempt; this evidently shows, not only that we are directed by a principle of pure disinterested goodness, but that this principle is superior to all control.—That this sublime idea of perfection, was realized and exemplified in the character of Jesus Christ, must appear to every one who attentively considers the history of his life.—The doctrines which he taught, for the instruction and reformation of mankind; and his public remonstrances against the reigning superstitions and corruptions of his country-men, drew upon him the severest persecution and reproach. The persons too with whom he chose ofteneft to converse, because they principally needed his instructions, or were best disposed to receive them, totally destroyed the reputation of his virtue, and made him to be hated as ‘the friend of publicans and sinners.’ Jesus nevertheless proceeded with the same benignity, as if no

such opposition, or discouragement had occurred.

Under this head also, may be ranked those beautiful expressions of humility, that are recorded in the life of Jesus. The pride of human nature usually disposes men to slight such offices of mercy, as may be thought below their station; and which for that reason tend to diminish the external deference and regard which is paid them in society. But the overflowing goodness of the blessed Jesus, was totally superior to every consideration of this nature. With as much readiness and pleasure he performed those offices of mercy, which were likely to be despised as below his attention and regard, as those which were likely to procure the most extensive approbation.—Thus, when travelling from Jericho to Jerusalem, * he stopped his journey, called for the two blind persons who were begging alms upon the road, and by a miracle cured them of their blindness, though the multitude, who at that time attended him, had rebuked them for calling upon Jesus; deeming them below his notice and regard.—From the same humble condescending goodness, † he took the little children which had been brought to him, in his arms, and blessed them, and from their

* Mat xx. 30.— † Mat. xix. 13.—

simplicity and innocence, taught the doctrine of humility; though the disciples had rebuked the persons who had brought them, thinking them below the notice of their master.—

* The same temper of mind most remarkably appeared, when he washed his disciples feet. This was deemed the meanest office of domestic life. Nevertheless, Jesus did this office for his disciples, as an example of that humble condescending goodness, with which he would have them behave amongst themselves; declaring, that if he who was their Lord and Master, submitted to this humble office, much more ought they to condescend to the humblest offices of goodness towards one another.

4thly, The piety and goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ, having for its object, the most important and extensive interests of human nature, was therefore totally superior to all those narrower principles of goodness, which are so natural, and so powerful in the mind of man. A fond attachment to our country, to our relatives or friends, are innocent and laudable, under proper limitations; but extremely apt to exceed their proper bounds, and to mislead the minds of men from a due regard to

* John xiii. 1.

more extensive and important obligations; nay, many of the errors and iniquities of life, proceed from their excess; and often too, among those who are of the best disposed natures. If a person, therefore, whilst he shows all becoming tenderness and sensibility, in the nearness of life, at the same time shows a more extensive principle of goodness, which no partial attachment can control, his character must appear in the most amiable light. In this light, an occurrence in the life of Jesus, may deserve our particular attention; * ‘ While he talked, ‘ with the people,’ i. e. as he was instructing them in the doctrines of the gospel, ‘ behold, ‘ his mother and his brethren stood without, ‘ desiring to speak with him. But he answered and said, Who is my mother? and who ‘ are my brethren? And he stretched forth ‘ his hands towards his disciples, and said, ‘ Behold my mother, and my brethren. For ‘ whosoever shall do the will of my Father ‘ which is in heaven, the same is my mother, ‘ and sister, and brother.’ This part of Jesus’ conduct, has been rashly blamed by some, as if he meant, by his example, to extinguish those affectionate and soft attachments to our relatives and friends, which are so useful, and

* Mat. xii. 46.—

the source of so much comfort in the present situation of human life.—No man however, who examines the whole history of his life, will believe that this was the spirit and intention of his conduct. He had lived till he was about thirty years of age, * in subjection to his parents, and had laboured with his hands for their support, in retirement and obscurity; though, even in his earlier years, he had discovered such wisdom and ability, as fitted him for appearing on the public stage, with the highest honour and applause.—† Among the twelve whom he had chosen to be his constant followers and friends, there was one whom he loved with a peculiar affection, and with whom it would appear, he lived in the reciprocal endearments of a delicate and tender friendship.—‡ In the last moments of his life, he gave a strong discovery of filial affection to his aged parent; when expiring on the cross, he recommended her to the care of his beloved friend, as he himself was then to leave the world:—§ and he sharply reproved the Pharisees, and scribes, because they broke through the ties of gratitude, and natural affection to their parents, by their superstition. These circumstances put together, sufficiently

* Luke ii. 32.—Mark vi. 3. † John xiii. 23. ‡ John xix. 25. § Mat. xv. 1.—

declare the sense which Jesus had of the regard that is due to the sympathies of nature, and the ties of friendship.

The behaviour of Jesus, therefore, in this passage of his life, admits of a very different explanation; and such, as is natively suggested from all the other circumstances of his life. He was at that time employed about the work which his Father had given him to do, which was to teach men the way to everlasting life. With the faithful execution of this work, he would suffer no other business, or tie to interfere: he considered those who were disposed to be his friends and assistants in this work, as connected with him by a more sacred and important tie, than what is suggested by the natural affections of the human heart. To instruct such persons in the important doctrines of the gospel, and in the method of enlightening and saving the souls of men, was in his judgment, a call from Providence, to which it behoved the tenderest inclinations of his nature to give place.—The conduct of Jesus considered in this light, instead of being defective, or blameable, deserves our highest approbation and esteem. It was intended to exemplify an important branch of virtue, which men need often, and much, to be reminded of; viz. that all the narrower affections of the human heart, even those of the most innocent

and amiable nature, ought always to submit to the direction and control of the more impartial and extensive principles of goodness.

From the instances which have been given it appears, that a generous concern for the everlasting interests of men, was not only the distinguishing and ruling principle of Jesus' life, but maintained a sovereign and invariable command over all the other inclinations of the human nature, and triumphed over every opposition it could meet with from the world.

It will give a farther illustration of the character and spirit of the blessed Jesus, to observe, that this leading principle of his life, did not only, with an influence superior to all control, exert itself in those circumstances of his life, wherein such an exertion was required, and in which it met with the strongest opposition from the weakness of humanity, and the malice of the world; but that at all other times, and in every situation of his life, it had the constant and the sole direction of his conduct. The great end for which he came into this world, was perpetually present to his thoughts, and engrossed his attention and concern at every moment of his life. Hence it was, that the different objects which he met with in his passage through this world, and the different incidents which happened in the progress of

his life, were considered by him, only in the light of their subserviency to the instruction, and salvation of immortal souls; and were improved by him in this view, with admirable wisdom.

This appears remarkably, in the apologues or parables, recorded in the gospel: in which from the works of nature, and the various incidents of human life, he conveyed the most apposite and engaging illustrations of religious and moral truths.—The same thing appears from the admirable manner in which he grafted his divine instructions on the different situations of his life. Thus, * from the circumstance of the woman of Samaria, her drawing water from the well, he took occasion to instruct her, with a singular propriety, in the doctrine of eternal life, as the living water which he brought from God, to refresh and comfort the immortal soul. † From the miraculous distribution of the loaves among the multitude, he conveyed the same instruction, under the similitude of the bread of life. ‡ From the cure of the man that was born blind, he led men to the knowledge of the light of life. § From the resurrection of La-

* John iv. 10.— † John vi. 26.— ‡ John ix. 4.
§ John xi. 25.—

zarus from the grave, he instructed them in the doctrine of a future resurrection to eternal life.

It was owing to the same prevailing and perpetual attention to the everlasting interests of men, that he took occasion to communicate the most important lessons of religion, from the curious or ensnaring questions that were put to him.—* When asked about the number of them that should be saved; instead of answering the question, which was rather curious than edifying, he grafted on it this important admonition; that every man should strive and labour for himself, to be among the number of them who should be saved.

† When he was asked whether the apostle John should die in the same manner in which he had foretold the death of the apostle Peter, he checked the useless curiosity, and immediately directed the attention of his friends, to their own proper business and duty, which was, ‘To follow him.’

It was from the prevailing influence of the same disinterested spirit, that he kept himself entirely disengaged from the usual connexions and projects of this world; whilst he watched with a peculiar attention on every incident and opportunity, which put it in his power to

* Luke xiii. 23.—

† John xxi. 20.—

promote the everlasting interests of men.— Thus, * when one applied to him, to determine in a question which he had with his brother, with relation to their temporal concerns; he immediately declined giving any judgment in the case. Jesus easily perceived that his determination would affect only the external interests of the contending parties, while it left their spiritual and everlasting interests, in the same situation in which they were before. The determination therefore of the question, was the province of a civil judge; but not of him, whose office was to instruct and save the souls of men. Nevertheless, with equal wisdom and propriety, he took occasion to instruct the person who had made the application, and the disciples who were present; how to form a right judgment of the highest interest, and happiness of man; admonishing them withal, against that covetous attachment to the riches of the world, which is the origin of all those unhappy contests which divide the hearts of men. ‘Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the things which he possesseth:’—after which admonition, he delivered a most instructive parable to the same effect.

A like discovery of his character, was given by his conduct towards Martha, and her sister Mary; when he visited at their house, * Martha, as a mark of her respect for Jesus, employed her whole attention in preparing a proper entertainment for him at her house.— Mary neglecting this external service, listened with a deep attention to the religious lessons which he taught.—Jesus observing their different behaviour, publicly approved of Mary's conduct, and blamed the conduct of her sister.—‘ Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.’—Martha had expressed her regard for Jesus, according to the fashion of the world, and in a way that would have been approved by any other person, who had come to visit her. Jesus however made no account of these expressions of respect. He preferred the behaviour of her sister Mary, when she listened to the instructions which he gave, and showed no other sollicitude, but that she might receive the benefit, and comfort of his gospel.—The reason of this conduct was, that he acted in a sphere of life, peculiar to himself. He came not ‘ to be ministered unto,

‘but to minister!’ and the blessedness of his life, consisted not in receiving, but in giving. His sole project in this world, was to spread into the minds of men those divine instructions which he brought from God; and whoever discovered the most candid and serious disposition to receive them, did him the most acceptable, and honourable service. Mary regarded him in this light, therefore her behaviour was approved. Martha had considered him in a different light, and therefore her behaviour was condemned.

It was from the same principle, that he commended the * behaviour of the woman who anointed his head, and wiped his feet with her tears and hair. Had these marks of her regard proceeded from the same idea of his character, that Martha entertained, when she received him at her house, he would undoubtedly have neglected them, as he had neglected Martha’s service; but they proceeded from a different cause, and Jesus hath himself explained it.

The woman had been convinced, that Jesus was the Son of God; that he had power to forgive the sins of men; and she had applied to him with success, to this effect. The marks of her respect, when she anointed him, and

washed his feet, were intended to express her gratitude for the pardon of her sins, and to signify her solicitude for the continuance of this mercy; * ‘She loved much,’ says Christ, ‘because much had been forgiven her.’ Thus the woman had considered Jesus in his genuine and proper character, and was anxious to secure those immortal blessings, which he had come from heaven to bestow.—Hence it may appear, that here, as well as in his conduct toward Martha, he acted wholly in the spirit of his sacred office, and by the influence of that heavenly wisdom and benignity, which directed him in every other action of his life.

It was from the influence of the same heavenly wisdom, and abstraction from the world, that he declined to interpose in the political debates which at that time prevailed among the Jews.—† When the Pharisees, with the Herodians, from an intention to entangle him, asked his opinion about the right of the Roman Emperor to levy tribute from the Jews, he gave such an answer as was calculated in the best manner possible, to promote a sense of piety to God, and a dutiful regard to the rights of men; without determining in what was merely a political debate, which had no connexion with the business of his office, as a

teacher sent from God; 'Render unto Caesar
' the things that are Caesars, and unto God
' the things that are Gods.'—* In like man-
ner, when he was required to pay the tribute
money which was collected for the service of
the temple, though he asserted his right to be
exempted, yet he meekly and patiently com-
plied with the demand, that he might not give
offence; or enter into a debate, which might
have obstructed the great and only purpose of
his life; the instruction and salvation of im-
mortal souls.

To give a more compleat idea of the mind
that was in Christ, it ought to be observed,
that when he acted on the influence of that
benevolence and pity to the souls of men,
which was the leading principle of his life, he
expressed a fortitude and strength of mind,
and at the same time a tendernefs and sensibi-
lity, that were very singular, and, which be-
ing equally discovered in his conduct, set the
peculiar turn, and spirit of his character in
the strongest light.—These two qualities hard-
ly meet together in the same character, in an
eminent degree. Strength of mind, and an in-
trepid zeal, in opposing the corruptions of
the world, have been usually accompanied
with a certain harshness and severity, which

destroys the more tender and humane feelings of the heart : and this appears to have been a blemish in the character of some of the best of our reformers. On the other hand, men of delicate and tender sentiments, are, from this particular complexion, apt to fail in that determined opposition, which they ought to give to the errors and corruptions of the world. When therefore, these two different qualities are united, and their different extremes are equally avoided ; they form at once, the most respectable, and amiable character. They discover withal, that the virtue of the person thus disposed, is not founded on his natural complexion, but upon a rational, and moral principle, seated in the heart. Now each of these, in an eminent degree, were united in the character and life of Jesus.

By the acknowledgment of his opposers,
 ‘ * He was true, and taught the way of God
 ‘ in truth, neither cared he for any man, for
 ‘ he regarded not the person of men.’ † This
 firmness and integrity remarkably appeared in
 the bold and open opposition which he gave
 to the most favourite superstitions of the po-
 pulace, and the prevailing corruptions of
 those who were in the first rank of power and
 popularity. Hereby he provoked the univer-

sal hatred of his countrymen against himself, as a dangerous innovator in religion, and one who intended to destroy their law and prophets. On this account he was condemned, and put to death; and thus suffered as a martyr in that cause which he came from heaven to promote.

Did any of the ancient philosophers in the same brave and honest manner, testify against the superstitions and idolatries of their countrymen? Amidst the many excellent lessons which they taught, did they not still comply with those absurd idolatries, which their philosophy should have led them to renounce? * The wisest and the best of them vindicated himself from the imputation of impiety, by appealing to the regard he had expressed for those ignorant idolatries, which were opposed with such a generous and manly zeal by the apostle of the Gentiles, when he preached the gospel to the Athenians †.

The behaviour of Jesus in this particular, was equally prudent and courageous. He prudently and piously observed those public forms, which either had their authority from God; or were serviceable to the cause of true religion: whilst with the most intrepid honour

* See Plato and Xenophon's Apologies. Go† Acts xvii.
16, —

and integrity, he publicly declared against the superstitions by which it was corrupted and debased. * The accounts which are given of the public and solemn manner, in which he testified against the corruptions of the Pharisees and Scribes, who were at that time deemed the guardians of religion by the populace; show an example of integrity, fortitude, and public spirit, which in a very distinguished manner mark the character of *him* who was to come into this world, as ‘a witness, a leader, and commander to the people,’ and of whom it had been prophesied, † That he should not fail, nor be discouraged, till he had set judgment in the earth.’

By this public opposition to the doctrine and example of the Pharisees and Scribes, against whom he constantly expressed the warmest zeal, Jesus gave the most convincing evidence of the disinterestedness of his designs, and that, † ‘He sought not his own glory, but the glory of him that sent him.’ The populace in every age are fond of a religion consisting of external form. To this they are usually attached with an excessive zeal, paying to it an attention and regard, superior to what they give to the most important laws

* Mat. xxiii. 1. — Mark vii. 1. — Luke xi. 37. —

† Isaiah xlii. 4. ‡ John vii. 18.

of moral conduct. 'This, in particular, appears to have been the distinguishing spirit of the Jewish nation, at the period in which our Saviour lived : and the Pharisees and Scribes being the chief conductors and examples of this popular superstition, were therefore followed with an implicit admiration, by the people of Jerusalem.—Had then Jesus intended to procure the favour of the Jewish nation, and to have ambitiously employed it to his own private reputation, or advantage ; he must have easily perceived, that the proper measure, was to flatter this prevailing inclination ; and to adapt the religion which he taught, to that excessive fondness for external form, for which the Jewish nation was at that period so remarkable.—Jesus however observed a very different and opposite plan. The religion which he taught, was of a very simple nature, and of a moral tendency ; consisting in the exercise of virtuous and good affections towards God and man, and in obedience to the important and eternal laws of ' justice, faithfulness, and mercy.' These with him were the weightier matters of the law ; which he set in opposition to all external forms, and in particular to the forms to which the Jewish people and their most admired instructors, were at that time most zealously attached. Hence, instead of gaining the

applause and leading of the populace, his instructions were exceedingly disgusting and unpopular; and therefore as an enemy to true religion, he was persecuted, and reproached, and put to death.

What puts this part of our Saviour's character in the strongest light, is this remarkable circumstance; that not only in the general strain of his instructions, he declared against the errors of the age and place in which he lived; but took every proper occasion to declare against the particular errors and corruptions of the persons to whom his discourses were immediately addressed.—An interested and designing teacher artfully accommodates his doctrine to the prejudices of his hearers, and tries to captivate their favour and applause, by flattering their favourite corruptions. But the blessed Jesus always chose such topics of instruction, and treated them in such a manner, as was most directly calculated to expose the favourite corruptions and mistakes of the persons to whom they were addressed; whether they were his professed friends, or his open adversaries. Many striking instances of this kind occur in the history of the gospel.—* When the Pharisees were watching him, and sought for an occasion of accus-

ing him, as a violator of the sabbath-day; he took the opportunity, both by his instructions and example, to correct their superstitious views of that religious institution, and to give them a rational account of its nature and design.—* Observing among the Pharisees with whom he was in company, the marks of an immoderate ambition, he took occasion to instruct them in the nature and importance of humility, and described the unlawfulness and folly of their pride.—On the same occasion, when a man of eminence among the Pharisees had given an entertainment at his house; (and probably thought that such expressions of his hospitality were a sufficient proof of the goodness of his character) Jesus took occasion to represent their insignificance, when they were bestowed on those to whom they could be of little or of no importance, and who had it in their power to make a suitable return; whilst the most important offices of mercy to persons in indigence and distress, and from whom no return could be received, were neglected and forgot.—On another occasion, we are informed, † that when he was discoursing to the Pharisees, who were noted for their covetousness, he taught them in a very candid and intrepid manner, the

guilty and destructive nature of their crime, and its utter inconsistency with that service of almighty God, to which they made very high pretensions.—In the same light we are to consider the explications which he gave in his sermon on the mount, * of the genuine extent and meaning of the moral law, in opposition to the explications which had been given by the popular and artful teachers of the times.

As Jesus thus candidly and intrepidly exposed the errors and corruptions of his countrymen, who were his open and avowed adversaries, he no less candidly opposed the favourite mistakes and errors of his friends. Their fond and sanguine expectations of temporal prosperity,—the vain imaginations they had got, about the external pomp and power of the Messiah;—their ambitious contentions for pre-eminence and place;—these he fairly and faithfully exposed; engaging them to follow him, and embrace the gospel which he taught, by no one idea that was suited to the taste of a vain and corrupt heart. The motives and encouragements which he set before them, could have no attractive, but with persons whose taste and temper was refined from every selfish, or ambitious passion: nay Jesus

fairly told his friends, that they should not be able to obtain the rewards and honours of his service, but by a voluntary resignation of all those interests and honours, which are pursued with the greatest eagerness, by the selfishness and vanity of man; and by a patient submission to all the opposite afflictions which the hatred and malice of the world could inflict.

If we consider the many instances of this kind which occur in the * life of Jesus, we must undoubtedly perceive, in a very strong light, the integrity and candour of his character; and that without desiring any favour, or assistance from the world, nay in spite of every opposition which the world could give; he rested the success of his cause on the basis of its own evidence and moment, and the peculiar protection of Almighty God.

To this openness and intrepidity, in declaring against the errors and corruptions of the world, Jesus added the most amiable tenderness and sensibility.—Whilst he was making his last public journey to Jerusalem, the sacred historian informs us, † that coming near the city, ‘He beheld it, and wept over it, say-

* Mat. x. 16.—34.—xvi. 24 — xx. 25.—xxiv. 9.—
Mark viii. 34.—Luke ix. 23.—57.—Luke xiv. 25.—xviii.
18.—John xvi. 1.—

† Luke xix. 41.—

‘ing, If thou hadst known, even thou, at
‘least in this thy day, the things which belong
‘unto thy peace! but now they are hid from
‘thine eyes. For the days shall come, that
‘thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee,
‘and compass thee round, and keep thee in
‘on every side, and shall lay thee even with
‘the ground, and thy children within thee;
‘and they shall not leave in thee one stone
‘upon another: because thou knewest not
‘the time of thy visitation.’—This city of Je-
rusalem over which he wept, and for which
he expressed his pity, in this affectionate and
tender manner, had given him the most inju-
rious and provoking usage. The beneficent
and mighty miracles which he had wrought,
and the gracious words which had proceeded
from his mouth, had been spitefully traduced;
and with the most malicious artifice, blacken-
ed into the appearances of guilt by the peo-
ple of Jerusalem: and he knew that in a few
days, he was to suffer much greater injuries,
and a miserable death from their wickedness
and malice. He knew withal, that those mis-
fortunes of the people of Jerusalem, over
which he thus wept and mourned, were to
come upon them, as the punishment of
their iniquity against himself; and as a sig-
nal attestation from the providence of
God to his own innocence and dignity.—In

these circumstances, the tenderness and compassion which Jesus here expressed, was very singular.—There is something in the construction of the human heart, which leads us to be pleased with the punishment of horrid and atrocious wickedness, especially if it is committed against ourselves. That self-esteem which is so natural to the heart of man, is hereby flattered and caressed. We look upon the punishment as a kind of reparation for the injury, and a just humiliation of the guilt and demerit of the sufferer.—A severer trial could scarce be given to this principle in human nature, than what was given to it when Jesus beheld the city of Jerusalem. It was however, entirely overcome by the superior influence of his compassion. The suggestions of that self-esteem, anger, and desire of revenge, which are usually so powerful in the heart of man, and would have been so natural in the present case; were totally suppressed. When he came near and beheld the city, he beheld it in no other light, than as an object of his pity. Forgetful of its wickedness, and malice against himself; forgetful of the vindication of his own innocence and dignity, which, he knew, was to arise from its destruction; regardless also of his own approaching sufferings and death, he beheld the city, and wept over it, and said, If &c.

In certain circumstances, grief and tears are not unbecoming in the greatest man : they may even indicate the dignity and greatness of his mind ; when they proceed from such sentiments as great and good minds only are susceptible of. It will be difficult for us to imagine any circumstance of life, in which they could appear with a more becoming dignity, or indicate a nobler turn of heart, than what our Saviour expressed when he beheld Jerusalem and wept.

Another strong discovery is given of the same state of mind, by the manner in which he foretold the treachery of Judas. ‘ Jesus, ‘ says the Evangelist John *, was troubled in ‘ spirit, and testified, and said, Verily verily I ‘ say unto you, that one of you shall betray ‘ me.’ That this trouble was not on his own account, but on account of the unhappy man by whom he was to be betrayed, may be fairly inferred from the narrative which is given of this matter by the other three Evangelists. When Jesus told his disciples, that one of them should betray him, he added, these Evangelists observe, a compassionate and tender lamentation over the wickedness and misery of the man of whom he spake. † ‘ The Son of man indeed

* John xiii. 21.— † Mat. xxvi. 24. Mark xiv. 21.
Luke xxii. 21.

' goeth as it is written of him : but wo to that
 ' man by whom the Son of man is betrayed :
 ' good were it for that man, if he had never
 ' been born.' This account given by three of
 the Evangelists, compared with the narrative
 of St. John, makes it evident ; that the trouble
 of his spirit, was the trouble of compassion
 for the miserable man, who was going by his
 wickedness to destroy himself. It is farther e-
 vident, from what the same Evangelist John
 observes ; that immediately after Judas had
 gone out to perpetrate the crime, Jesus ex-
 pressed the greatest satisfaction and compla-
 cency with relation to himself, because by
 what he was to suffer, through the treachery
 of Judas, his heavenly Father, and himself
 were to be glorified. * ' When Judas was gone
 ' out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glo-
 ' rified, and God is glorified in him.'—Con-
 sidering the matter in this light, Jesus here
 expressed a very uncommon strain of tender-
 ness and generosity. When men suffer by
 their own wickedness, especially if their wick-
 edness be of a very hateful and atrocious
 nature, the sentiments of pity are usually si-
 lenced by hatred of their wickedness, and a
 sense of the justice of their punishment. This
 is much more the natural situation of the hu-
 man heart, when the guilty suffer for a crime,

which hath been committed against ourselves. But the goodness and humanity of Jesus excluded every sentiment, but that of pity for the miserable man who was going to betray him. He made no reflexions on his own innocence, or on the guilt of his betrayer, but such as proceeded from this principle. When he spake of his iniquity, it was not to express resentment, but compassion; viewing it only in the light of its connexion with his future misery, ‘When he testified and said, one of you shall betray me; he was troubled in spirit, and said, The son of man goeth as it is written of him, but wo unto the man by whom he is betrayed: good were it for that man he had never been born.’

An instance of the like humanity and tenderness appeared soon after he had been betrayed, and immediately before his crucifixion. When he was going from Jerusalem to the place of execution, he observed some of his particular friends weeping, and bewailing his unhappy fate. But Jesus with a greatness, and dignity of mind peculiar to himself, comprehended their distress, and desired them to be concerned only for themselves, and their posterity, but not for him. * ‘Jesus turning unto them, said, Weep not for me, but weep

‘ for yourselves, and for your children. For
 ‘ behold, the days are coming, when they
 ‘ shall say, Blessed are the barren &c.’ Being
 perfectly resigned to the will of God, with
 relation to his own personal calamities, his
 whole attention was employed about the inte-
 rests of his countrymen and friends. Their a-
 trocious wickedness in putting him to death,
 and the miseries which they were bringing on
 themselves, and their posterity, were, even in
 the bitterness of death, the only objects that
 affected him, and about which alone he would
 have his weeping friends express their pity and
 concern. Considering the mournful situation
 in which Jesus was at that time, he discovered
 in this conduct, a grandeur and humanity,
 which would have been much admired in
 common story*.

I shall mention only one other instance of
 this delicate humanity and tenderness of mind,
 which, amidst expressions of the highest dig-
 nity and grandeur, appeared in the life of Je-

* See a great encomium by Voltaire on St. Hilaire. His
 arm being shot by the same bullet that killed Marshal de Tu-
 renne, and his son who stood by him weeping and bewailing his
 misfortune, St Hilaire said to him, ‘ It is not for me, but for
 ‘ that great man, (pointing to Turenne) for whom you ought
 ‘ to mourn.’ Words, says Voltaire, that may be compared to
 that is most heroic and sublime in the records of history.
 aire Lewis XIV. vol. 1. pag. 162.

fus.—* At the grave of Lazarus, we are informed, that Jesus ‘groaned in spirit, and was ‘troubled, and wept.’ This distress appears to have proceeded from that social tenderness and sympathy, which is planted in our nature by the hand of God; and which is indeed one of the most beautiful impressions of his hand, upon the heart of man. Jesus seeing Mary and her sister Martha, and the Jews who had come from Jerusalem on occasion of the death of Lazarus, much afflicted, and in tears, on the loss of their beloved friend, mingled his grief and tears, and ‘wept with them that ‘wept. When Jesus saw his sisters weeping, ‘and the Jews also weeping, he was troubled ‘in spirit, and wept.’—This distress might probably proceed also from another cause, and one that was peculiar to himself. Jesus, we may believe, observed the ignorance and weakness of his friends, in being so deeply moved by an event which behoved in his eye, to appear so slight a one; viz. that their virtuous friend had, for a little while, got the start of them in his passage to the heavenly world. In this light Jesus had directed them to consider the event, v. 23. ‘Thy brother ‘shall rise again. v. 25. I am the resurrection ‘on and the life, he that believeth in me,

‘ though he were dead, yet shall he live.’—Jesus had a perfect knowledge of the happiness of the spirits of the just made perfect. He knew that his departed friend was now among that blessed number; and having the whole compass of eternity before him, the interval between the death of Lazarus and that of his surviving friends, behoved to seem a very inconsiderable period in his eye. Viewing the death of Lazarus in this peculiar light, he pitied and wept for the extreme affliction of his friends, proceeding from such an inconsiderable cause. Had they been sufficiently enlightened by the discoveries of life and immortality, which he had given them, their affliction he knew, would have been remarkably diminished, if not totally removed. He therefore ‘groaned within himself, and was troubled ‘in spirit, and wept,’ when he saw his friends so deeply affected by the temporary afflictions of this present life, and so little affected by the interesting objects of that future and eternal life, in which he had instructed them.

Thus, it may appear with what an amiable tenderness of spirit Jesus was endowed. Compassion for the miseries of men, especially for those miseries, which they had brought upon themselves by their own ignorance and guilt; was the ruling principle by which he was conducted through the whole of life. To the

gentle dictates of this generous compassion, all impatience or contempt, anger or revenge, so natural and so powerful in the mind of man, constantly gave place.—You will find him accordingly, always putting the most merciful and mild constructions on the faults of men, which they could admit of; especially on such as were committed against himself.—* Hence he check'd the severity and resentment of his disciples against the Samaritans, who had oppos'd him in his journey to Jerusalem.—† Hence he check'd the pride and severity of the Pharisees against the woman who had been convicted of adultery.—‡ Hence, when he rebuk'd his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, for their inattention and stupidity, he at the same time made the mildest and the best apology for them that he could. 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'—§ Hence he check'd the anger of the disciples at the sons of Zebedee; adding the divinest lesson of meekness and humility, that ever had been taught, 'Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you: whosoever will be great among you

* Luke ix. 51.— † John viii. 1. ‡ Mat. xxvi. 40.
§ Mat. xx. 24.

‘ let him be your minister: and whosoever
 ‘ will be chief among you, let him be your ser-
 ‘ vant; even as the Son of man came not to
 ‘ be ministered unto, but to minister, and to
 ‘ give his life a ransom for many.’—* Hence
 in fine, expiring on the cross he interceded with
 his Father in behalf of those who were barba-
 rously putting him to death; adding for them
 an apology, which nothing but the highest
 pitch of humanity and mildness could suggest,
 ‘ Father forgive them, for they know not
 ‘ what they do.’

To set this gentleness and goodness of the
 blessed Jesus in its proper light, it ought to be
 observed; that by the construction of the hu-
 man nature, men are led to consider wicked-
 ness and guilt, as the proper object of their
 hatred and anger, and as meriting a proper
 punishment. This part of the human frame
 we cannot but approve, and in our present si-
 tuation it appears to be of great importance.
 There is nevertheless another light in which
 the milder dispositions of humanity would lead
 us to consider the wickedness of men; viz. as
 the source of their own unhappiness and mis-
 ery; and on that account, the object of compas-
 sion to a virtuous and honest mind. If then,
 while one retains all that aversion and hatred

to the vices of the world which is requisite to discourage and oppose them, he, at the same time, from a meek and calm attention to the misery, with which they are connected in the scheme of providence, is disposed to pity, rather than to anger, and from this gentle principle employs the strongest efforts in his power, to enlighten and reclaim the vicious; this undoubtedly discovers the most excellent and perfect state of mind we can conceive.—In this state of mind, Jesus so invariably preserved himself through the whole of his transactions with mankind, that in no one circumstance of his life, do we find him expressing any sentiment or affection towards them, but what proceeded from its influence. The wrathful and vindictive passions of the human heart seem to have had, in no instance, the direction of his conduct; though they often met with the severest provocation. We are indeed informed that he was once provoked to anger. But it was but once: and by attending to the circumstances of the case, we shall be able to perceive, that this single instance of his anger perfectly consists with what has been just now observed, nay is a strong confirmation of its truth. When the Pharisees were watching for an opportunity of accusing Him, * ‘He looked round about on them,’ says the

Evangelist, 'with anger, being grieved for the 'hardness of their hearts.' This hardness of their hearts, or the unfeeling and obstinate opposition which they gave to the important instructions which he brought from God, the truth of which he had confirmed with such convincing evidence; mov'd his anger. But this anger, we are told, proceeded from his grief; he look'd upon them with anger, 'being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.' This grief could be nothing but the tender and humane distress which his pity made him feel, when he observed their ignorance and guilt, and its fatal consequences on their future happiness. It was the grief which a compassionate and tender heart conceives at the sight of human misery. His anger proceeding from this generous and amiable source, could not be accompanied with pride, hatred, or revenge, but with gentleness, benignity and mercy: nor could it prompt him to oppose, but, to promote the happiness of the persons by whom it was provoked. It was the same species of anger which is felt by an affectionate and tender parent, when he sees his beloved child straying from the path of innocence and happiness, and running himself into destruction by his own insensibility and folly. This anger, not arising from the selfish but the social and humane affections of the heart, prompts the pa-

rent, not to harshness and severity, or to hurt the welfare of his child; but on the contrary to save him, by every merciful and useful office in his power.—When anger proceeds from an idea of injustice to ourselves, it may be deemed a selfish passion; and is more or less accompanied with hatred, and desire of revenge; prompting us to inflict some punishment or evil, on the person against whom it is conceived. But when it rises from the idea of another's folly and injustice to himself, and is accompanied with grief and sorrow at the sight of his unhappiness, it is a feeling that proceeds from goodness, and has no other effect upon our conduct, than to prompt us by every gentle office in our power, to save the person against whom it is conceived, from his unhappiness and folly.—This was the mind ‘which was in Christ Jesus;’ which besides its own excellence, was suited with a singular propriety to the nature of his office, and the motive of his coming to this world, which was, ‘To seek and save that which was lost.’

It will give us a more complete idea of the character of Jesus to observe, that in prosecuting the design for which he had come from God, he constantly expressed a sublime indifference about his own situation in this world, and all those advantages of life which so deep-

ly interest the affections of the rest of mankind. The only object which affected him, was the advancement of the glory of his Father, by the holiness and happiness of men. He had no other project or attachment upon earth. This world he viewed only in the light of its being lost in ignorance and wickedness; and himself only in the light of his being sent into it by his Father, to conduct mankind to knowledge, holiness, and immortality. In every other respect, as he expresses it himself, 'He was not of this world.' This elevated state of mind appears not only from the great indifference with which he treated all the external comforts of this life, but from the singular tranquillity and cheerfulness of mind with which he bore all its opposite afflictions; more especially the great afflictions which he suffered at his death. Jesus had foreseen them, and had frequently foretold them to his friends. When he spake of them, it was with expressions of complacency, considering them as the appointments of his heavenly Father, and the means of his accomplishing those great designs of Providence for which he had come into this world; and which, in this view, he had voluntarily chosen to undergo. Two instances in particular may deserve our attention:

1st, In a passage of the gospel formerly ad-

duced, * it is observed, that immediately after Judas had gone out to execute his traitorous design, Jesus, as to what concerned himself, expressed his approbation and complacency, in the following terms; ‘ Now is the ‘ Son of man glorified, and God is glorified ‘ in him:’ that is; Judas is gone out to execute his wicked and insidious design: by his means I am just going to be delivered into the hands of cruel men, and to suffer a dishonourable and miserable death. I rejoice nevertheless, in the melancholy prospect; as I know that by this means my office as the Saviour of the world shall be known, and in consequence of this, the glory of my Father, and the everlasting interests of men shall be secured.

2dly, Another strong discovery of the same state of mind is recorded by St. Matthew †. When Jesus had acquainted his disciples with the ignominious and painful manner in which he was to die, Peter full of zeal for the honour of his master, (which however at that time he did not understand) thus expressed his dissatisfaction and surprize; ‘ Be it far from ‘ thee, Lord: this shall not come unto thee.’ To which Jesus thus replied; ‘ Get thee behind me, Satan, or thou adversary, thou art

* John xiii. 38.

† Mat. xvi. 23.—

‘ an offence to me ; for thou favourest not the
 ‘ things that be of God, but those that be of
 ‘ men :’ i. e. thy judgment in this matter is directed by the wisdom of this world, but not by the wisdom that comes from God. It appears from this reply, that Jesus was regardless of himself, and determined in the strongest manner, that his own interest and honour should be entirely overlooked, if ever they interfered with the glory of his Father, or the happiness of men : nay, that he would regard his best friends as his greatest enemies, if they should endeavour to discourage him from suffering in this cause. The judgment therefore of the apostle Peter, though it proceeded from friendship to himself, was rejected by him with a generous disdain.

In the like circumstance, any other person would have commended the affection of his friend, and joined with him in expressing his desire to avoid the sufferings of which he spake ; deeming it a sufficient expression of his virtue, that if this could not be done, he was resolved to suffer with a patient submission to the will of God. But Jesus, in this reply, expressed a height of zeal for the glory of his Father, and the happiness of men which was altogether peculiar to himself.

Agreeable to this beginning, was the whole of his following behaviour. In the evening in

which he was betrayed, he went into the garden of Gethsemane, well knowing what was to befall him there; and determined voluntarily to put himself into the hands of those who had concerted his destruction. When he knew that Judas, with his band of soldiers, were come into the garden to execute their treacherous design, he said to his disciples*, ‘Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.’—We are informed indeed, that soon after he had come into the garden, he fell into a strange astonishment, and with an appearance of horror and reluctance, prayed unto his Father, that if it was possible, he might be delivered from the prospect that was now before him. He began, says his historian†, ‘To be sorrowful, and very heavy: and said to his disciples, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.—Being in agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground.’ This agony and sorrow, with the earnest and repeated supplications which he addressed unto his Father, may seem at first view inconsistent with the fortitude and strength of mind, which he discovered in the preceeding periods of his life, and had expressed in so

* Mat. xxvi. 46.

† Mat. xxvi. 37.— Luke xxii. 44.—

strong a manner to his friends, but a very little while before: and it may be difficult for us fully to apprehend the nature, and the cause of this distress*. It appears however

* Although it may be difficult to apprehend the nature of the agony which Jesus suffered in the garden, or to explain the cause of it, yet one thing ought to be attended to; that Jesus had then the immediate prospect, not only of a painful and miserable death, but of suffering it as 'a sacrifice and atonement for the sins of men:' and that when he came into the garden to be betrayed into the hands of those who were waiting to inflict this miserable death, he began the painful sacrifice, and was just arrived at what he calls, 'The hour, and the power of darkness.' Now what might be implied in the suffering of death as 'a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of men,' what painful and amazing apprehensions, the prospect of it in this light, might awaken in his mind, it is difficult for us to determine or conceive. This, however every one knows, that the same degree, or kind of outward sufferings, raise very different emotions in the mind of man, according to the different causes from whence they are supposed to spring, and the different lights in which they are apprehended by the sufferer himself. An innocent and worthy man, suffering in the cause of truth and virtue, supported by the consciousness of his own integrity, and the merited esteem of God and man, suffers death, in a manner, and with impressions very different from those which accompany the sufferings of a guilty man, tormented with the consciousness and remembrance of his guilt, and a sense of the merited contempt and hatred of the world.—Jesus was indeed an innocent and virtuous sufferer; and no part of his distress could be accompanied with the consciousness of guilt, or the reproach of his own heart. But as he now began to suffer, as 'a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of men,' it is not easy for us to say,

from the relation which is given of this matter, that whatever was the cause of this distress, he bore it with the same expressions of regard and submission to the will of God, and the same attention to the everlasting interests of men, by which he had been distinguished in all the preceding periods of his life. In the midst of his distress, his attachment to the will of God, and his desire to fulfil the merciful intentions of his providence, sufficiently appeared. When he prayed, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;' he imme-

how far an agony of mind might be awakened by the prospect now before him; resembling the anguish of a guilty criminal, when he suffers, and is put to death by the hand of public justice.—That this, or something similar, was really the case, we are led to apprehend from the account which the scriptures give us of the reasons and manner of his death; particularly when they inform us, 'That he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows: that he suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God: that he redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us; and, that the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.' These strong expressions seem to signify, that when Jesus suffered death, it was with a peculiar bitterness and agony, because he suffered it as a propitiation for the sins of men: and that along with the external pains and agonies of his accursed death upon the cross, he suffered all that inward anguish and astonishment which it was possible, or proper for the justice of Almighty God, to cause *him* to undergo, who was to expiate the sins of men, and to give sinful creatures a sufficient impression of the guilt and demerit of their crimes.

diately subjoined those memorable words, ‘ * Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. If this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done;’ i. e. If what I now ask, is not consistent with the wise and gracious purposes of Providence; if it should obstruct the great design for which I came into this world; it is what I neither ask nor choose: in that case I relinquish my request, and resign the matter wholly to thy holy will. Thus did the piety and goodness of his heart triumph over the reluctancy and weakness of his nature.—The fortitude and resignation of a virtuous man under the calamities of life, does not signify, that he is insensible of the greatness and weight of his calamity; but that feeling it, according to the natural constitution of a man, he nevertheless willingly resigns himself into the hand of God, and proceeds immoveably to act the virtuous and worthy part assigned him by his providence. This was evidently the situation of Jesus’ mind, when he was in agony, and prayed unto his heavenly Father, ‘ Thy will be done.’

This same state of mind was farther signified, by his mild and gentle treatment of his friends, in the midst of his distress. When

they fell asleep, he gently reprov'd them, for their inattention and stupidity; but added an apology in their behalf, which nothing could have suggested, but that same benignity and goodness, which was conspicuous in every action of his life: ‘ * What, could ye not watch with me one hour? The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’—When a person is overcome by affliction and distress, and struggles against it with a reluctance that is inconsistent with the fortitude and patience of a virtuous mind; all the soft and kind emotions of the heart subside, and an unfeeling fullness and discontent usually succeeds. When, therefore, under the severest pressures of distress, the sufferer preserves that same goodness and benignity which he had expressed in the most serene and easy circumstances of his life; he gives in that case, the strongest proof of his fortitude and patience, and that he still retains the full possession and enjoyment of himself. This was ‘ the mind that was in Christ,’ even at this dark and mournful period of his life.

Immediately after Jesus had come out of this astonishment, and had prayed unto his Father in the manner we have seen, he proceeded to his last sufferings and death, with

the same determined resolution which he had expressed before. When Judas and his band of officers appeared, he most readily and cheerfully put himself into their hands *. 'Judas then having received a band of men, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanthorns, and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. 'Jesus saith unto them, I am he.' A circumstance is here mentioned by the Evangelist which is remarkable. When Jesus informed the soldiers that he was the person whom they sought, † 'they immediately started back, and fell to the ground. Whether this proceeded from a conviction of his innocence and dignity, which at that instant struck them irresistibly, or from some extraordinary exertion of the power of Jesus; it shows he might have easily confounded and dispersed them, if it had been his choice; and that therefore, it was entirely with his own consent, that they apprehended him.

At the same time, he cured the servant's ear, which the apostle Peter had cut off: acquainting Peter, that if he pleased he could

* John xviii 3.—

† John xviii. 6.

pray to God, and receive the assistance of his mighty angels; but that he was determined to decline all resistance in that matter; knowing that what he was to suffer, was agreeable to the will of God, as declared and predicted by his prophets.

After Jesus had been betrayed and apprehended, we shall find through the whole of his deportment, till he expired upon the cross, such expressions of benignity and meekness towards men, and of submission to the will of God, accompanied with such a generous concern to accomplish those important ends of Providence for which he had come from heaven, as in a very particular manner manifest the spirit of his character.—We may consider in this light, * the mild and gentle manner in which he addressed the soldiers who had come to apprehend him; ‘Are ye come out
‘as against a thief with swords and staves to
‘to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in
‘the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.’—The gentleness of mind with which he received Judas who betrayed him, † ‘Friend, wherefore
‘art thou come?’—The answer which he made to the disciples when they attempted to resist the soldiers; ‡ ‘The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?’—

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his head, and yielded up the Ghost.—Looking backward on all that he had done, and perceiving that the wise and great designs of Providence were now fully accomplished by his sufferings, he therefore cheerfully resigned his life into the hands of God, saying, * ‘It is finished.’—Looking forward from this present, to the future and eternal world, he breathed out his last, in the exercise of holy confidence in God, and with joy committed his departing spirit into his hands. † ‘Father into thy hands I commit my spirit.’

In this manner did the Lord Jesus Christ leave this world, and return unto his Father. His death was in all respects equal to his life. In both it appears how much his mind was raised above this world; and that neither its allurements nor afflictions, nor its friendship or malice, could give the smallest interruption to the progress of his goodness. Superior to these, in every instance of his conduct, he proceeded to the last moment of his life, with invariable constancy, to execute the work which his heavenly Father had given him to do.

Examples of heroic magnanimity are always affecting. When we see the worthy man involved in deep affliction and calamity, yet undaunted and serene, and still preserving the

enjoyment of himself with composure and tranquillity, his fortitude and strength of mind is regarded with peculiar approbation and complacency.—When to this composure, in the midst of his calamity, he adds the exercise of every virtuous and kind affection towards men ; preserves the same benignity and goodness to his friends ; and gives the same attention to their happiness, that he did in the most serene and easy periods of his life : we behold so noble and generous an effort, with high admiration and surprize.—When to this he farther adds the softest emotions of humanity and mercy, to the unjust and cruel instruments of his calamity, expressing no other affection towards them, but a sorrowful compassion at the thought of their unhappiness, while he neither shrinks from his own misfortunes, nor supplicates our tears and sympathy for himself ; there is something so divinely graceful in this conduct, that it raises our astonishment, and seems to rise above the highest effort of humanity ! That Jesus suffered, and left the world in this manner, will appear to every one who gives attention to the history of his sufferings and death.

SECTION IV.

General reflections on the history and life of Jesus Christ.

HAVING attempted to delineate the character of Jesus Christ, from the history of his life, it is natural to pause a little, and reflect on the prospect which it sets before us.

The history of Jesus is of a very singular and extraordinary nature; and the character it exhibits to our view, is as singular and extraordinary. It presents us with an example of excellence and goodness, far above the common level of the world; and seems to realize those sublime ideas of the perfect man, which were entertained with so much admiration and delight, by the best philosophers in ancient times. In this light, the character of Jesus Christ will appear, by reflecting on the great principle by which he was directed; and the invariable influence which this principle preserved in every circumstance of his life, and on every instance of his conduct.

We have seen the ruling principle and motive of his life. It was that same principle by which we must believe the Almighty was induced to create the human race, and by which,

he is directed in the whole of his divine administration. According to our best ideas of his nature, nothing can be deemed of such importance in the eye of God, as the establishment of truth and righteousness among the rational subjects of his kingdom. To this end, as alone adequate to the designs of infinite goodness and perfection, we must conceive all the other parts of his administration, to be ultimately referred.—To re-establish this important interest among mankind, when it was unhappily obstructed and impaired, Jesus came into this world: and from thence the whole tenor of his life and manners was derived.—Directed by this principle, the blessings which he spread among mankind, were not only of the most excellent, but of the most permanent and diffusive nature; and such, as men of every age and nation under heaven, might equally participate. The wisdom which he brought from God, and that religious virtue which he laboured to establish upon earth, were of as much importance to every other age and nation of the world, as to that age and nation of the world in which he lived. He was therefore equally the friend and benefactor of the whole human race.

We have also seen the invariable influence of this principle on the whole of his deportment. The circumstances and reception which

he met with upon earth, were such, as had the strongest tendency to check the influence of this benevolent and holy principle, and must have totally surmounted it, if it had not been invincible. Every thing that could be done by the wickedness and malice of mankind, was opposed to the exercise and progress of his goodness. He proceeded, nevertheless, with the same unshaken constancy, as if no discouragement, or opposition had occurred. In doing the will of God, and promoting the immortal happiness of men, he was totally regardless of himself,—unaided by the comforts of this world,—contradicted by the highest malice and ingratitude,—and at last, without the least impatience or complaint, became a willing martyr in the cause for which he had come from God, by an infamous and miserable death.—When the Philosopher, in a celebrated passage of antiquity, described the character of the just and perfect man, treated with all the hatred and contempt, which is due to the vilest criminal, while he merited all the honour and esteem which is due to the most perfect virtue; he unknowingly, described the character and situation of the Son of God. The features are so strongly marked, that one can scarcely miss the application *.

* The passage referred to, is in the 2d book of Plato's

Added to the extraordinary merit of the character, we are struck with the idea of its wonderful propriety.—Jesus was declared to be the Son of God, in a sense that was peculiar to himself. ‘He shall be great *,’ said the angel, when he announced his conception to the Virgin Mary, ‘and shall be called the Son

Republic, and is to the following purpose; ‘He is a simple
 ‘and ingenuous man, desiring, not the appearance, but the
 ‘reality of goodness. We must take from him the appearance
 ‘of goodness: for if he shall appear to be just, he shall have
 ‘honours and rewards; and thus it may be uncertain whether
 ‘he be such for the sake of justice, or on account of the re-
 ‘wards and honours that are given him. Let him be stript of
 ‘every thing but justice. Whilst he doth no injustice, let him
 ‘have the reputation of doing the greatest. Let him be tor-
 ‘tured for justice, not yielding to reproach, and such things as
 ‘arise from it; but immoveable till death.’

To this passage from a Heathen author, it may not be improper to subjoin a passage from one of the Apocryphal books, called the Wisdom of Solomon, which looks like a description, or prophecy, of Jesus Christ

Cap. ii. 13.—‘He professeth to have the knowledge of God:
 ‘and he calleth himself the child of the Lord.—Let us see if
 ‘his words be true: and let us prove what shall happen in the
 ‘end of him. For if the just man be the Son of God, he will
 ‘help him, and deliver him from the hand of his enemies.
 ‘Let us examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we
 ‘may know his meekness, and prove his patience. Let us
 ‘condemn him, with a shameful death; for by his own saying
 ‘he shall be respected. Such things did they imagine and were
 ‘deceived: for their own wickedness hath blinded them.’

• Luke i. 31.

‘ of the Highest.’ His person is accordingly described in terms which signify the highest eminence and dignity: ‘ He is the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.—He had been in the form of God.—In him the fullness of the Godhead dwelt,—and men beheld in him the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.’—Jesus also was declared to be the Son of man, and the Saviour of this world: and as the Son of man, ‘ He came to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many: to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: to have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.’ From these two different prospects of his character, we are naturally led to look for something in the history of his life, that shall, in each of these respects, distinguish him from the rest of the human race; and be equally expressive of his dignity and greatness, as the Son of God, and of his goodness and compassion, as the Son of man.—Agreeably to this, the history of his life presents us with the view of a very singular propriety.—Majesty and mercy, the most respectable talents of power and wisdom, with the most amiable expressions of mildness and humanity, meet together with a wonderful assemblage in the life of Jesus, and at once exhibit to our view what is most sublime and

beautiful in human manners.—By his wisdom he perceived the secret recesses of the human heart, and the uncertain and remote events of Providence.—By his power he suspended, and controlled the laws of nature at his pleasure.—By his command the storms were calmed, the waters became solid as the earth, the deaf heard, the sick were healed, and the dead arose. The heavens too were opened to announce his glory, and the devils astonished and affraid, acknowledged him to be the Son of God.

Amidst these extraordinary expressions of his greatness, he gave equal proofs of his humanity and goodness. His power and wisdom were employed, not in raising useless admiration and surprise, far less in raising terror and astonishment; but in doing the most amiable and useful offices of mercy. To bless mankind was the sole ambition of his life, and the mighty talents with which he was endowed, were employed only as the instruments by which he gratified the generous ambition. Had he marked his character only by the exertions of his power and wisdom, he might have shown himself to be the Son of God; but would not have, equally, shown himself to be the Son of man, and Saviour of the world. To the dignity and grandeur of the first, he therefore added the humanity and mildness of the

second character: and from his first appearance on the public stage, to the last moment of his life, his history contains such a series of events as equally discovers the dignity and greatness of the Son of God, and the gentleness and mercy of the Son of man.

Reflecting further on the life of Jesus Christ, we are struck with another expression of its singular propriety. Jesus is declared to have come immediately from God, with a commission from him 'To save this world when it was lost. I am come, says he, * a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me, should not abide in darkness.— I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting.'—Coming in this manner, and with this design from God, nothing could appear to him of much importance in this world, but the faithful and successful execution of the commission which was given him by his Father. All the other transactions, in which the rest of mankind are embarked with so much eagerness and zeal, behoved to seem in his eye, extremely frivolous and insignificant. From the whole history of his life, it

accordingly appears, that no object upon earth affected him, but the ignorance, the wickedness, and miseries of men; that no interest or project attracted his regard, but the instruction and salvation of immortal souls. The pursuits of opulence and fame, of power and sensual pleasure, were treated by him with a total inattention and indifference. He spoke of them, with that contempt, and of those who were seduced by a false idea of their importance, with that commiseration, which became the messenger of God, 'Who was not from beneath, but from above.' On the subject of his commission, he addressed the world with an affection and solemnity, that marked the spirit of his character and office, in a very distinguished manner.—'One thing is needful, and there is a better part which shall never be taken from you.—What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul.—Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves, treasures in heaven, where moth and rust corrupt not, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.—Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; for after all these things do the Gentiles seek;—but seek first the king-

dom, and righteousness of God.—Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life, which the Son of man will give unto you. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,—how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!—These affectionate and solemn admonitions, were given by *him* who had come immediately from God, to enlighten and save the souls of men, with a very singular propriety.

In the last place, when we reflect upon the history of Jesus, we cannot but observe with what a graceful dignity and ease, he delivered his instructions to the world. It was not by a gradual and elaborate research, in the manner and stile of a philosopher, but from a fullness of grace and truth within himself, and which he had derived immediately from God. From thence, with perfect ease, and by immediate intuition, he transcribed that perfect system of religious wisdom which he taught the world. Hence too proceeded that familiar acquaintance with the great truths of God, which appears in the whole of his instructions. He spoke of the measures and intentions of the providence of God, of the situation of mankind as the subjects of his kingdom, of the future judgment, of the state of

angels, and departed souls, and of his own departure from this world to the Father; with a calmness and tranquillity, with a freedom and familiarity, which could not have appeared but in him who 'Spake the words of God, and testified what he himself had seen, and heard.'

From the whole of these reflexions, one is naturally led to put the question to himself, Whence had the Evangelists this extraordinary history? They were illiterate and artless men, taken from the low and servile offices of life. They had neither the advantages of a liberal education, nor had learned the policy and wisdom of the world. Whence, then, had they their idea, of the character and life of Jesus Christ; in which they have exhibited a model of consummate excellence? and whence those instructions they put into his mouth, which contain such an admirable system of religious wisdom? They must have had them, either from some extraordinary discernment and wisdom of their own, (of which however, no one will easily believe they were possessed;) or, they recorded only 'What their eyes had seen, and their ears had heard of the word of life.'

What adds to our surprise in this inquiry is, that the view which the Evangelists have given of the character of Jesus, is entirely

formed upon a simple narrative of facts. In the most artless manner, they record the doctrines which he taught, the afflictions which he suffered, and the measures of his conduct, leaving us to judge from thence, of his real character. A more accurate and extensive ingenuity is requisite, to trace the conduct of a wise and virtuous man, in the detail of life and manners, than to give a general undistinguishing description of his character. If it then surpassed the skill of those illiterate and artless men to exhibit from their own invention, such a pattern of consummate excellence and wisdom; much more, doubtless, it surpassed their skill, to draw it forth and support it, with an uniform propriety, in the detail of a life, full of action and variety.

What chiefly adds to our surprise in this enquiry is, that these writers of the gospel have given us the history of the most extraordinary person that ever appeared among mankind; whose life, had it been a fiction, could not have been filled with a proper series of sentiments and manners, without a very singular degree of ingenuity.—Jesus was the messenger and Son of God. He had come into this world, with a special commission from his Father, to enlighten and redeem the souls of men, by the wisdom of his instructions, the purity of his manners, and by the voluntary

sacrifice and resignation of his life. He had therefore a very difficult and sublime part assigned him; and to perform it with becoming justness and propriety, a very singular degree of wisdom, dignity and goodness, was required. But every candid reader of the gospel will perceive, that his deportment was in all respects, worthy of his high and sacred character.

Hence the question must return with double force: Whence had those ignorant and simple men, (for simple and ignorant they were, e'er they were instructed by their master) whence had they the wisdom and ability, to fill up the life of such an extraordinary person, with a series of instructions, sentiments and manners, equal in every instance, to the dignity of his character? The question that was put by the Jews concerning Jesus, was a very pertinent and proper one, had they attended to the proper answer, 'Whence has this man this wisdom, having never learned letters?' The question may be put with the same propriety, Whence had the writers of the gospel the wisdom requisite to give the world those records, which they have left, of the doctrines and transactions of the Son of God?

Nor ought it to be forgot in this enquiry, that Judea was at that time sunk into the darkest superstition; and the Jewish people

the most stupid, undiscerning people under heaven. It appears from that period of their history, that their learned Rabbis, as well as the common people, were grossly ignorant of true religion; and in place of it, had substituted a multitude of insignificant and useless rites. Yet these simple writers of the gospel, have given such ideas of religion, and such a system of morality, as confessedly surpass, not only the best instructions which were given by the ancient philosophers, but those which were given by the Jewish legislator. The laws of Moses, or at least, the explications of them, which were at that time in the highest credit and authority, were with great propriety and wisdom, * corrected by the instructions which they put into the mouth of Jesus Christ.—To suppose all this to be the work of their own imagination and contrivance, is truly to suppose a thing far more marvellous, than the extraordinary facts which they have recorded in the history of Jesus.

Upon the whole review which has been taken of the life of Jesus Christ, and the spirit and design of his religion, may we not conclude, that a wise and good man will be very cautious of embarking in the cause of infidelity, or attempting to diminish mens regard for

the respectable founder of the Christian faith; much more of treating him with such indecent and contemptuous abuse, as in any other case, every man of sense and candour would condemn with indignation.—Can a man calmly read the records of the gospel, as he does any other ancient record, and not feel the strongest indignation against the leaders of the Jewish nation, for that spiteful and injurious abuse, with which they treated him? Can he miss to see, from the wisdom and importance of the doctrines which he taught, from the disinterested and incessant labours of his life to promote the happiness of all around him; and from the modesty, benignity and meekness of his whole deportment, that he merited a very different reception and regard?—That his being publicly traduced as a devil, and a deceiver of the people; the friend of sinners; a blasphemer, and the enemy of God, proceeded from the deepest prejudice and malice?—And, is that contemptuous abuse, with which his character and religion have been treated, by some of his opponents in later times, any more to be excused?

It would be absurd to say that every man is bound implicitly to believe the religion of his country; otherwise the greater part of mankind would be bound to believe the most palpable absurdities. But if the public faith be

subservient to the interests of true religion; if our countrymen and friends derive the strength and security of their virtue, and the comfort of their lives, from the religious faith in which they have been bred; can a man, with innocence, employ his wit and learning to discredit its authority, and bring it into contempt?—Philosophical and curious enquirers, may, it is possible, differ in their judgments about the degree of evidence which is offered for the truth of the gospel history. But does any man affirm that the religion of the gospel, as it is taught and exemplified by Christ himself, has not the most powerful tendency to promote the virtue and happiness of men: or that Christians may not, by its influence, arrive to a height of purity and happiness, which it would have been difficult, or impossible, for them to attain upon any other system of religion upon earth?—In every nation where the Christian religion has been received, and tolerably understood, it has produced the most desirable effects. In our own nation in particular, can any one doubt, that there have been in former times, and are at present, great multitudes, who draw from the doctrines of the gospel, and the example of its founder, the highest improvement and comfort of their lives; and whose virtue, usefulness, and happiness, would be much im-

paired, were they to be deprived of the knowledge and faith of Jesus Christ?—Would then a good man rashly, and without any cause that he can justify, strive to dispossess them of this knowledge and belief?—Nay, whatever difficulties may be supposed to accompany the proofs which are offered of the truth of the gospel history; yet it is not easy to see how the good man and the lover of mankind can refrain from wishing that it was supported by the clearest evidence; and that the influence of those instructions, and of that example which it exhibits to the world, was diffused over all the earth. Nor do I think, a good man can ever doubt of his being approved by God, and happy under his administration, in all the future periods of his being, by endeavouring after a conformity to the instructions and example of Jesus Christ; although he were to suppose himself in a mistake about the facts which are recorded in the history of his life.

Granting that the arguments offered in defence of the gospel history (since it has been made the subject of a critical debate) were as extensive and intricate a thing, and as much beyond the understanding and capacity of the far greater part of mankind, as a certain ingenious * philosopher contends; yet in this re-

spect, they stand upon the same footing with the arguments offered in defence of the truths of natural religion, against the objections by which they have been opposed. 'Tis only a few retired and speculative men, who have leisure to examine, and capacity to understand them. The rest of mankind ever did, and ever must, embrace religious truths, either by some immediate perception of their evidence and certainty, whenever they become the object of their thought; or as things which they have learned from education and example. In this way, the knowledge of religion, and the most interesting concerns of human life, have hitherto proceeded; and the virtue, and happiness of men have been preserved: and upon the same footing they will probably proceed to the end of the world.

The objection therefore which is made by this philosopher against the authority of the Christian revelation, appears to be but frivolous. It cannot, he thinks, be deemed a revelation of the will of God to every man, and in which the general interests of mankind are concerned, because it is impossible for them to examine and discuss the evidence which is offered in support of it.—But admitting this to be the case, was it a thing unworthy of the wisdom and benignity of Providence, to reveal a system of religious and moral truth of

the highest moment and utility, by a messenger from heaven, whose authority behoved to be perceived upon the plainest evidence, by every man to whom he was made known at his first appearance in this world; and which may still be ascertained, in the strongest manner, by the curious and inquisitive, in spite of every objection by which it is opposed: and being thus promulged, to leave its propagation and reception in the world to proceed in the same manner in which other important branches of knowledge, which direct the conduct and affairs of men, are propagated and received.

There appears to be as little weight in another objection which he makes against the authority of the Christian revelation, viz. that it cannot be supposed, that God would make the virtue and happiness of mankind, even of one individual of the human race, depend upon the knowledge of a fact, which happened in a distant period, and obscure corner of the world; which has not yet been made known to many of the human race; and the knowledge of which among Christians, is entirely owing to some accidents, whereof they themselves had no direction.—It ought to be considered that men's virtue and happiness, in various respects, depend upon the like uncertainty, and arise from many different acci-

dents, which are entirely out of their power; whether we suppose that God has given a revelation of his will or not. In a great measure, men owe their religious knowledge and belief, together with the happiness which shall proceed from thence, in any future period of their being, to the circumstances of the age, country, and place of the world in which they live; to the education and examples which they meet with; and various other accidents, no way depending on themselves.—Many of the human race, from the unfortunate influence of their situation, have been debarred from every kind of intellectual and religious improvement, and kept in a degree of darkness and stupidity, very little superior to the brutal state.—But is the knowledge of the truths of natural religion to be thought unnecessary to the happiness of men, or do we reckon it injustice in the Deity to make their happiness depend on those improvements which arise from the knowledge and belief of them, because the circumstances of many of the human race render it impossible for them to attain this knowledge and belief; or, at least, to give that attention to religious truths which is requisite to produce their proper influence? The obstructions which arise from original meanness and stupidity, from the necessity of constant labour in the servile offices

of life, from the want of education, or from bad education, from vicious example, and other circumstances, as effectually prevent their knowledge of some of the most important truths of natural religion; as the manner in which the Christian religion was revealed, prevents its being published and made known to all mankind. To affirm therefore that the Christian revelation cannot be from God, because it is not equally promulged, and made equally certain and perspicuous to every man, is in effect, not only to oppose the credit of that revelation, but the credit also and importance of natural religion: and to arraign the justice of the providence of God, because he has not given equal power and opportunity to every man, to attain the knowledge and belief of it.

Nor will it be found a sufficient objection against the justice of this remark, that the great truths of natural religion have an intrinsic evidence, that is obvious to men of every understanding and capacity; which (it may be thought,) cannot be affirmed of the Christian revelation.—Let the truths of natural religion be supposed ever so self-evident and obvious, they will not however be perceived, till they are attended to, and made the object of deliberate and serious thought: and it is owing to education or example, or to

some other external circumstance, that, with many of the human race, they are ever made the object of their attention and regard: whence, for want of some such favourable circumstance, great numbers of mankind seem to live and die, in total ignorance; even of these self-evident and obvious truths. Men's attaining therefore to the knowledge of natural religion, seems to be owing to external accidents, as well as their attaining to the knowledge of the Christian revelation.—

May it not be fairly concluded from the whole of this review, that a good man, and the friend of mankind, e're he venture to oppose the credit and authority of the Christian revelation, will previously employ the most serious precautions in his power,—be careful to exclude every rash or wanton prejudice, that may insensibly mislead his judgment;—be assured upon the strongest evidence, that the history of Jesus Christ is not only a fabulous imposture, but hurtful to the virtue and happiness of men;—and that he has withal, something better, and to which the world will pay an equal submission and regard, to put into its place?—Would a man of real good nature and benevolence otherwise, endeavour to deprive his friends of that knowledge and persuasion, to which they can assure him, they principally owe the useful-

ness, and virtue, and comfort of their lives? The Christian, were we to suppose him in some doubt about the divine authority of the Christian revelation; yet conscious to himself that he is the wiser, the better and the happier man, by his knowledge of the gospel, and attachment to its author, might with great propriety reply to the person who is employed in this ungenerous and hurtful manner, as Cicero makes Cato address his friends on the subject of a future immortality,

‘ Quod si in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortales esse credam, libenter erro :
 ‘ nec mihi hunc errorem quo delector, dum
 ‘ vivo extorqueri volo.’ De Senect.

A P P E N D I X.

Containing an account of the motives on which the Jewish council and the Roman governors in Judea proceeded in condemning Jesus to be crucified.

IF Jesus was a person of such distinguished excellence and usefulness as he is described in the history of the gospel, it may appear unaccountable and surprising how he came to incur the aversion and hatred of his countrymen to such an extraordinary degree: how it happened that the supreme council of Jerusalem, with the approbation of the populace, and the concurrence of the Roman governors, condemned him to be crucified as an impious and hateful criminal. This deserves our particular attention and enquiry, as hereby we may attain a more complete knowledge of the character of Jesus Christ, and the design of his religion.

Jesus was condemned in three different courts.—He was first condemned in the council of Jerusalem:—their sentence was confirmed by Pontius Pilate, at that time governor in Judea:—and being sent by Pilate to be tried by Herod governor in Galilee, Herod and his council rejected and despised him.

The views and motives on which each of them proceeded, appear to have been different; according to their different and peculiar characters, and the different lights in which they were thereby led to consider the pretensions and character of Jesus.

1st, The high priests, and rulers of the Jews, especially the Pharisees, whose influence at that time predominated in the Jewish council, were extremely superstitious. They observed with a peculiar severity, the outward forms and ceremonies of the law, whilst they made but small account of the moral and eternal rules of justice, equity and mercy, which Jesus called the weightier matters of the law. Nay to such a pitch of superstition did they carry this external preciseness and formality, that a great variety of rites were invented by themselves, or admitted by tradition of the elders. These were honoured and observed with more exactness and severity, than the most important laws of God. * ‘They taught for doctrines the commandments of men, and by their traditions, transgressed the commandments of God.’ By means of this ceremonial exactness and severity, they had the appearance of extraordinary sanctity; were in high credit and authority among the

credulous and undiscerning multitude; and swelled with an immoderate conceit of their own religious importance, and of the deference that was due to their superior merit and capacity. Hence they were disposed to entertain a peculiar jealousy of every one, who, by giving a different and juster view of the nature and design of true religion, might endanger their authority and influence among the people of Jerusalem. Those, in a more especial manner, who, as teachers of religion, attempted to reduce it to a simpler form, though nearer to the plan of reason, and the express command of God, were sure of being the object of their implacable aversion and revenge. That this was their peculiar character, sufficiently appears from the history of the gospel: and from hence it was that they conceived such a violent and implacable enmity against Jesus,—It was one great design of the doctrine which he taught, to reduce religion and the worship of his heavenly Father to a simpler form, than what had been directed by the laws of Moses, and consequently to a much simpler form than what had been taught by the present rulers of the Jewish church. Jesus placed the soul and substance of religion, in the spiritual and virtuous dispositions of the heart of man, and in the pro-

per influence of these upon the conduct of his life; in the exercise of 'judgment, mercy' and the love of God,' which he called the 'weightier matters of the law.' This doctrine Jesus taught, not only as of itself the most rational and useful system, but as a doctrine which he had an immediate commission from God to deliver to mankind; and in proof of this commission wrought many glorious signs and wonders in the presence of the people,—Had this doctrine and authority succeeded at Jerusalem, it was easy for the chief priests and rulers to foresee, that their beloved superstition would very soon fall into disuse, and be despised; that the reputation of their wisdom and superior discernment, would be lost; and alongst with these, the influence they had obtained upon the conscience and religion of the populace; an influence which in the highest manner gratifies the ambition and pride of man. From hence proceeded their inveterate enmity to Jesus; and stimulated by this enmity and hatred, they condemned him, as a blasphemer, to be crucified. Their superstition, their vanity, and their love of power, which appear to have been the chief ingredients in their character, were all equally offended by the doctrine and authority of Jesus. 1st, Their superstition and ex-

extreme attachment to external forms, was hurt by his authority. * Hence it was, that one of the witnesses whom the judges had suborned, witnessed against him, as a crime, that he had said, the temple of Jerusalem should be destroyed: † and hence, the crime which Stephen, the first martyr that suffered in the cause of Christianity, was accused of, was this, that he had said, that Jesus would destroy the temple, and change the customs which Moses had delivered.—2dly, Their vanity and pride was equally offended. ‡ Hence they deemed it an opprobrious thing, that a Nazarene, the son of a carpenter, and a person undistinguished either by his birth or education, should seem to equal them in wisdom, and assume the office of a teacher of religion.—3dly, In fine, their love of power and popularity, was offended and provoked: hence their consultation together in the council; § ‘What do we; for this man doth many miracles; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.’ Hence the reflexion of the Pharisees, among themselves, when they observed the growing reputation of his miracles; ** ‘Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold the world is gone after

* Mat. xxvi 61. † Acts vi. 11.— ‡ Mat. xiii. 54.—
§ John xi. 47.— ** John xii. 19.

'him:' and hence it was that Pilate knew, * that the chief priests had 'delivered him 'for envy.'—Thus, Jesus was condemned by the council and the people of Jerusalem; and fell a sacrifice to ecclesiastical ambition, tyranny and superstition.

2dly, Let us next consider by what motive Pilate was induced to ratify the sentence of the Jewish council. Pilate was a man of a very different character, and proceeded against Jesus on a very different principle. He was full of the wisdom of this world, artful, interested and ambitious: and disposed to sacrifice the most sacred ties of conscience to the ends of his ambition. From the history of the gospel it appears, that a sense of equity and justice, was not totally extinguished in his conscience. Perceiving the innocence of Jesus, and the envy of the Jews, he became exceedingly solicitous to acquit him of the guilt, of which, he saw, he was calumniously accused; and by several expedients, attempted to persuade the Jews to consent to his release. When he was at length prevailed upon, by their obstinate importunity, to ratify the sentence of the council of Jerusalem; he at the same time publicly declared his opinion of Jesus' innocence; remonstrated against

the injustice of putting him to death; and *by a silly artifice attempted to devolve the iniquity of his blood upon the Jews.

Nevertheless, though Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence, and of the iniquity of putting him to death, and had publicly declared his judgment of the case; he was at length induced to condemn him to be crucified: and from the narrative which is given of this matter, the motive of his conduct sufficiently appears. It was the wisdom of this world. It was to serve the ends of his ambition, and to promote his interested and political designs. He was told by the rulers of the Jews, that Jesus was an enemy to the power of the Roman Emperor; that his doctrine and pretensions tended to undermine or weaken his authority, and that the safety of the state required, that a check should be given to his treasonable doctrine and designs; that, in fine, he could not be Caesar's friend, if he refused to give the sanction of his authority to the sentence of the Jewish council, which had condemned him to be crucified. Pilate listened to this artful and political remonstrance of the Jews. Though he perceived their artifice and envy, yet being apprehensive of his interest with Caesar; (which he knew to be in

danger from his mal-administration,) if in spite of all their earnestness and importunity, he should still refuse to comply with their request, at length gave sentence that Jesus should be crucified. That this was the motive of his conduct appears abundantly from the whole narration, which is given of this matter in the gospel, and particularly from the account given by St. John, * ‘That upon the council’s remonstrating to Pilate, that if he let Jesus go, he could not be reckoned Caesar’s friend; Pilate instantly desisted from his former opposition, went into the judgment-hall, and judicially ratified their sentence, that he should be crucified.’—Thus Jesus was condemned by the wisdom of this world, and his life was made a sacrifice to the interests of political ambition, avarice and pride.

3dly, Let us lastly consider the treatment which Jesus met with from Herod, who was at that time governor in Galilee. Pilate had remitted him to Herod’s court, in order to get rid of the infamous and hateful task of condemning him to death, after he had publicly announced his innocence. When he appeared before Herod and his council, he was treated in a very different manner. He

Herod and the officers of his army, who are called 'his men of war,' did not think his case deserved a deliberate and solemn trial: they treated him however, in a manner that was much more painful and severe, to an honest and ingenuous mind. They put upon him all possible marks of infamy and scorn, as a person that was below the notice of a solemn council; and good for nothing, but to be exposed as an object of the public derision and contempt. Herod and his men of war, says the Evangelist, * 'Set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.'

What might be the cause of this contemptuous abuse?—We have reason to believe, it proceeded from an insolent and atheistical contempt of the piety and purity of Jesus' life; and of the heavenly and holy doctrine which he taught; which they represented to themselves, as the consequence of ignorance and folly. We find, from the experience of the world, that men of loose, abandoned principles, are exceedingly disposed to treat that simplicity and purity of manners, which is prescribed by the laws of true religion, in this contemptuous and scornful manner, with a view to give themselves the greater boldness

and tranquillity in wickedness, and the air of superior wisdom and discernment; they labour, not only to disprove the principles of true religion, but, if possible, to turn them into ridicule and scorn, as the suggestions of a credulous and deluded fancy. That this was the character of Herod and his men of war, and the cause of their derision of the Son of God, is extremely probable from the account which is given us of Herod's life, in the records of the gospel. This Herod was the person, of whom we are informed, * that he lived in a criminal correspondence with Herodias, his brother's wife, while his brother was alive; who imprisoned John the Baptist, because he had reprov'd him for this wickedness, and put him afterwards to death, to gratify Herodias' debauchery and revenge. From this series of wickedness, we may conclude, that he was a man totally corrupted and abandoned in his morals; and disposed to treat religion and the purity of life which it requires, as an object of contempt: and his officers, or men of war, we may with great probability presume, were persons of the same character and principles.

Agreeable to this turn of character, was the treatment which they gave the blessed Je-

fus, when he came before them. His calm, submissive silence in the presence of their council; (for we are told, * ' That when Herod questioned him in many things, he answered him nothing,') the simplicity and meekness of his manners; the indifference which he discovered about the judgment of the world, and the safety of his life; together with what had been reported of his holy doctrine, and retirements from the world, and of his assiduous and zealous labours to propagate religion, and reform the lives of men; all this we may believe, appeared to them, to be the consequence of ignorance, of folly, or fanaticism: and that he himself, though a harmless, was a weak, contemptible enthusiast. Though they deemed it therefore, an improper, or unnecessary thing, to make a solemn judicial trial of his case; yet they immediately judged him to be a proper object of their scorn, and putting all the marks of infamy upon him, that their fancies could devise, sent him back to Pilate. Thus Jesus was set at nought by Herod and his council. Prompted and seduced by their profligate and licentious principles, his innocent and holy life was regarded by them as the object of their scorn.

The account which has been given of the views and motives upon which the several parties, who were concerned in Jesus' death, proceeded in condemning him, may serve to throw an additional light upon his character, and the design of his religion. There was the strongest opposition between his character and designs, and those of the persons by whom he was condemned; and it was this opposition which produced his condemnation. Jesus taught, and was himself an eminent example, of that rational and useful piety, which lies, not in the observance of external and mysterious forms, but in the practice of the moral and eternal virtues of a holy life: in the exercise of justice, faithfulness, mercy and the love of God. In the council, therefore, of the Jews, his innocent and holy life was sacrificed to the demands of an insolent and haughty superstition, and the dictates of ecclesiastical severity, jealousy and rage.—Jesus likewise taught, and was an eminent example, of a disinterested indifference about all the ambitious projects of this world. He placed the excellence and happiness of man, in the piety and virtue of his life, and in that peace of mind, and confidence in God, which naturally result from them. To these, he taught his friends, all the outward interests and projects of the world should submit. When there-